









# SKETCHES

OF THE

# POETICAL LITERATURE

OF THE

# PAST HALF-CENTURY

IN SIX LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE EDINBURGH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION

BY

D. M. MOIR

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## P R E F A C E

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THE Directors of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution having resolved that their Lectures for the Session 1850-51 should be devoted to a review of the Social, Literary, and Scientific History of the Half-Century then just terminating, the Author was requested to undertake the six which, by their Syllabus, were to be appropriated to the Poetical Literature of the period. His first impression certainly was to decline the honour—for most assuredly he held it to be such, seeing the names with which his own was to be brought into conjunction—partly on private grounds, and more especially from a conviction of his inadequacy to do justice to the subject; nor were his scruples for some time overcome by those on whose judgment he has been accustomed to place reliance.

In addressing himself to his subject-matter, the first prominent difficulty was the disposal of materials so comprehensive into such sections as might enable him to bring the whole, as it were, in a bird's-eye view, within the prescribed limits; thus giving at least something like a due share of consideration to each. The comparative importance of the long line of celebrated men who were to be submitted to critical remark, was the next source of perplexity; nor was the delicacy or difficulty of this task lessened from the circumstance of the Author having been honoured by the friendship of several of the illustrious departed, as well as of not a few of the illustrious living, whose works were necessarily to form the main themes of comment.

The likelihood of accomplishing this, without occasioning disappointment or provoking displeasure in some quarters, the Author soon felt compelled to make up his mind to, as an impossibility. But be this misfortune to whatever extent it may, he can unhesitatingly affirm, that in his critical judgments—which of course can go for no more than they are worth—he has approached his task solely and exclusively in a literary point of view;



and, in as far as he himself can judge, with that impartiality and candour with which he would have viewed it had the writers to be examined belonged to the era of Queen Elizabeth or of Queen Anne. That many of his critical conclusions may be erroneous, or founded on insufficient data, is very probable ; but that is quite another matter. Nor is he at all wedded to these—more especially as applicable to our more recent poets—in any degree incompatible with whatever change of opinion he may hereafter deem to be just and fair.

With regard to the style and tone of the following pages, it may be as well to say, that they are scarcely such as their author would have adopted had their contents been intended solely for the closet ; but were simply preferred as those most likely to conduce to effectiveness in delivery before a very large popular audience. Nor in this, so far, was he disappointed ; for the measure of their acceptance proved to be very much beyond his most sanguine expectations, and has indeed been a main reason for committing them to the press ; more especially as, from the limited time allowed for delivery, a considerable

portion of each Lecture was necessarily omitted, as well as many of the extracts, which had been selected for illustrations and proofs of particular positions.

To the mighty minds whose productions passed in review before him, the Author has ever been accustomed to look up with love and veneration—feelings which, however unceremoniously he may occasionally seem to have presumed to discuss the merits of those productions, remain unabated and unchanged. As the temporary occupant of a critical chair, he hesitated not to speak out his opinions freely and fearlessly; but he trusts without one iota of personal prejudice, or the slightest leaning towards asperity. Indeed this could not well be; as not a single name has been adverted to, throughout, which did not suggest its claims to attention by some high or peculiar excellence.

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# POETICAL LITERATURE

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### LECTURE I.

State of Poetical Literature at the commencement of the present century.—

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SUCH was the mastery which the writings of Dryden and Pope had acquired over English literature, that their influence continued to be felt to the utmost limits of the last century: their sentiments and modes of thought seemed stereotyped; and the music of their verse was that to which not only Churchill and Samuel

Johnson, but Goldsmith and William Hayley, tuned their lyres. Many circumstances had, however, been latterly combining to bring about a revolution in public taste ; to stimulate to novelty ; to extend the circle of thinkers and readers ; and to irrigate and refresh the fields of literature. Scarcely had the American war terminated, when that lurid flame skirted the horizon, which was afterwards to blaze abroad in the raging hurricane of the French Revolution—when thrones were to be shaken, and faiths were to be convulsed, and old landmarks removed, and the very bonds which held society together stretched to the verge of utter rupture.

The literature of an age is the reflection of its existing manners and modes of thought, etherialised and refined in the alembic of genius ; and the truth of this position will be evident, if we turn for the highest tone of the Greek mind to Æschylus and Euripides—for that of the Roman, to Virgil and Horace—for that of the Italian, to Dante and Ariosto—for that of the German, to Goethe and Schiller—for that of the Spanish, to Calderon and Cervantes—for that of the French, to Racine and Corneille—and for that of the English, to Shakspeare and Milton. It may also be admitted, that the intellectual character of an era must ever be, in a great measure, moulded and modified by cotemporaneous exigencies. In semi-barbarous ages, indeed, there have appeared, like gigantic apparitions, spirits that have grappled with and overcome stupendous difficulties ; and yet have evidently been so far before their time that their rising might be considered merely heliacal, as, single and unaccompanied, they have irradiated the gloomy atmosphere to which their extinction seemed to lend an added darkness. Such was Alfred, the morning star of Saxon civilisation ; such was Roger Bacon, who paid the penalty for thinking more deeply than his cotemporaries could comprehend ; such was “The starry Galileo with his woes ;” and such was Geoffrey Chaucer,



by more than two centuries the harbinger of that day which was to rejoice in the meridian sunlight of Shakespeare and Milton.

Since the era of these Titanic spirits, it would appear, on a general survey, that we have been more anxiously employed in refining the materials to work upon, than in adding to our hereditary treasures. It may be argued, that circumstances are not now so advantageous for observation as they were of yore, when the mind of the nation was emerging from rudeness to refinement,—when manners retained their sharp angles, and etiquette had not amalgamated the various groups of society into one great concrete mass. One of the phases of civilisation being concealment,—the teaching man how he may most dexterously and successfully hide his wants, and yet realise his wishes,—this suppression of the external working of the passions lends an artificial varnish to character; through which it is more difficult to divine the springs of action, and to penetrate the motives by which individuals are governed.

While the materials for verse, therefore, cannot well exist in abundance in the Cimmerian chaos of primal barbarism—for we cannot desecrate the name of poetry by applying it to what may be gleaned from the rude memorials of crime and cruelty and bloodshed, which brutalise the infant steps of society—scarcely more affluent will they be found in the zenith of that luxury which states and peoples generally attain immediately before their decline, and final overthrow and extinction. There is a middle space between light and darkness, a twilight with its receding stars and its rising sun, a table-land separating the confines of barbarism and refinement, which appears to be that best adapted for most things,—for intellectual exercise and enterprise, as well as for the development of the imaginative faculty; for there the arabesque pageantry of night and the shadows of darkness have not yet disappeared, and the

dawn is fringing the orient clouds with gold. Pictu-  
resqueness is the attribute which renders this particular  
aspect of man the best adapted for representing him in  
a poetical light. His actions appear in it more impulsive  
and less involved ; and, from the alternations of light  
and shade, with a more aërial perspective, the world is  
in it rendered a fitter theatre alike for

“ The painter’s pencil and the poet’s pen.”

This was the very state of things existing at the  
commencement of the present century ; and with it a  
new grand epoch of the world’s history was to begin.  
A band of giant intellects, as in the days of Elizabeth,  
was again to illumine the foot-hardened and cloud-  
shadowed pathways of literature and of science. Old  
feelings were to be set aside, old customs to be abrogated,  
old manners to pass into oblivion ; and out of bloodshed  
and confusion, and revolutions civil and religious, a new  
order of things was to arise,—gloomy, ghastly, deplor-  
able, and hopeless, according to some ; but, according to  
the sun-bright hopes of more ardent spirits, freighted  
with

“ — a progeny of golden years,  
Permitted to descend and bless mankind.”

Far, as yet, have these Elysian dreams been from  
perfect fulfilment ; yet have we every reason to plume  
ourselves, when we regard what has been done for  
literature by Scott, by Wordsworth, by Byron, by  
Crabbe, by Coleridge, by Wilson, by Campbell, by  
Southey, and their compeers ; and what science has  
achieved through Watt, through Davy, through Her-  
schel, through Dalton, through Brewster, through  
Wheatstone, through Faraday, and others. By the  
steam-engine we have conquered alike the winds and  
the waters ; and, from their being the masters, have  
made them the slaves of man. The great phenomena

of nature, resulting from electricity and magnetism and galvanism, have now been nearly ascertained to have one common origin; while, in the electric telegraph, space has been annihilated by the same wondrous agent; which realises the line of Pope, by

“Wafting a sigh from Indus to the Pole;”

and may, almost without metaphor, be said to be the fire which Prometheus is fabled to have stolen from heaven. When we consider, moreover, that all these things are as yet only in a state of infantine progression, we have reason to be proud, not only of our day and generation in its literary and scientific men, but of the ample modicum of germinating knowledge which that generation has contributed for the furtherance of the best interests of mankind throughout all future ages.

To appreciate this, so far as literature is concerned—and with poetical literature we have now alone to do—we have only to take a rapid bird’s-eye glance backwards. Many circumstances, whether civil, religious, or both, contributed to make a marked separation between the age of Anne and that of Elizabeth. Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton had been succeeded by Dryden, Cowley, and Pope, while the dreary gulf between them had been almost wholly given up to civil broil, sectarian controversy, and fanatical persecution. A better order of things had at length been established. The veto which had been put on Fancy was removed, and Pegasus was permitted to capricole. The passionate energy of the national mind, which had been allowed to find exhibition and exercise only in the great drama of politics, now found vent in other channels; talent shot forth its hydra heads in every department of the social field; while genius, freed from the shackles of superstition and prejudice, owned no restraints but those legitimately imposed on it by morality and religion.

It is not to be denied that, with the departed order of things, some peculiarities worth preservation were necessarily swept away—as the American floods, while they hurry down debris and drift-wood, may also whirl away to the ocean particles of gold mixed up with their turbid waves. With the increase of national power and wealth perished much that contributed to the nutrition of its infant strength. The bold bluff freedom and heartiness of English manners, when—

“ ’Twas merry in the hall,  
When beards wagged all ”—

when every passing stranger had his seat at board, and every beggar had his dole, had been gradually subsiding into the technicalities of grade, the finicalness of address, and the formalities of polite decorum. Old customs, handed down from generation to generation, were allowed to fall into desuetude: Yule and Christmas were shorn of half their festivities; and young ladies began to think the games of hunt-the-slipper, hot-cockles, blind-man’s-buff, and snap-dragon, antiquated and vulgar. As with the pursuits, so with the person. The same change took place in dress and in manners, as in the habits of thought, and the contour of dialogue. Nature and warm-heartedness were being gradually superseded by art and luxury. We were becoming what the French were at the time, and what the Greeks and Romans had been before us—a polished nation. Cities increased, and arts and agriculture flourished, while year after year man was reduced more and more into a mere machine. The elements of romance were gradually and steadily, although imperceptibly, disappearing from the land, and the hills and valleys of Britain became a more flourishing but far less poetical region.

In the first great era of our national literature—that of Spenser, and Shakspeare, and Milton, and Taylor,

and Hooker, and Bacon, and Browne, each of whom may be regarded as the fountain of separate great rivers, whose branching waters were intellectually to fertilise the land—we discover that their materials were found in great first principles—in the grand and overboiling emotions of the heart—in the passions, whose display stamp character—in the heroic as to action, and the tender as to feeling. The materials of the second grand era—that of Dryden, Pope, and Swift—are admirably huddled together in the lines of Cowper :—

“Roses for the cheeks,  
 And lilies for the brows of faded age;  
 Teeth for the toothless, ringlets for the bald;  
 Heaven, earth, and ocean, plundered of their sweets;  
 Nectareous essences, Olympian dews,  
 Sermons, and city feasts, and favourite airs;  
 Etherial journeys, submarine exploits;  
 And Katerfelto, with his hair on end  
 At his own wonders, wondering for his bread.”

The great forte of Pope and his school lay in their acquaintance with, and skilful depicting of, the fashions, follies, and frivolities of polished life, wherein art is made, in a great measure, to supersede nature in subject, style, and expression. His imagination never hurries him away on the pinions of inspiration, nor is the music of his verse like that of the old ballad—a simple

“melody,  
 That’s sweetly played in tune.”

His taste keeps his fancy in check, and is continually pruning her wing. His versification loses occasionally its raciness, from being laboured into mellifluousness. He deals not with the great passions of the human heart—love, jealousy, hatred, remorse, despair; he is all for parlour-window ethics, and the niceties of morale. His heroes are beaux, battered or unbattered; his heroines are belles, of the same descriptions; his levée

is made up of courtiers, generals, gamesters, artists, authors, and men about town. His females are madams and their maids—ladies dressed out in the pink of fashion, who dispose themselves in knots through the drawing-rooms,—

“Some sipping scandal, and some sipping tea.”

From the windows of the house we have a glimpse of nature indeed ; but it consists of shaven lawns and clipped hedges, and diamonded parterres, beyond which are parks redolent of tame deer, artificial cascades, and Chinese bridges. Pope had, however, this—his own enchanted circle—

“And in that circle none durst walk but he,”

save as an humble follower. He was among the most perfect of English writers, and will ever stand on one of the summits of the three-peaked hill, as the author of the “*Essay on Man*”—of the “*Windsor Forest*”—of the “*Epistle of Abelard to Eloïse*”—of the “*Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady*”—and of “*The Messiah*”—and as the yet unsurpassed translator of Homer. Let no one imagine, therefore, that I have no relish for his beauties, simply because I think them of a less magnificent order than those of some of his great predecessors. Indeed, it would be as vain to look for another Alexander Pope as for another Edmund Spenser.

The influence of this school—whose origin may be traced back to the poets and dramatists of the age of Charles the Second, which acquired stability from the transcendent powers of Dryden, and which was perfected by Pope—continued its mastery, as I have already remarked, until almost the commencement of the present century. A dawn of better things showed itself in Akenside and in Thomson, and expanded into the daylight with Cowper. To him we are to look as the great regenerator of our modern poetry ; for his star

was towards its setting when that of Wordsworth arose. Throwing aside pedantic trammels and metrical sing-song, he dared, after his own fashion, to look upon and describe nature, as well as men and manners; and he gave to his pictures a freedom and a freshness which had been for centuries banished from poetical limnings. To walk abroad, even in the city, with Cowper in our hearts, is the next best thing to a walk in the country itself. All his sketches are full of truth and nature; and nothing can surpass his winter scenery—his snow-covered valleys and frozen brooks, and leafless trees, and hungry birds picking on the highway. He deals not, like Thomson, so much in general description as in presenting to the mind's eye a series of features, the aggregate of which forms a perfect portrait. We delight in Thomson as an instructor, while we look up to him with something of reverence and awe; but we sit down on the sofa with Cowper, and feel that we love him as a friend.

It was not to be expected, however, that an innovation like that of Cowper in his "Task," was immediately to influence, and carry with it, the undivided suffrages of a generation which had so enthusiastically rejoiced in Darwin, Hayley, and Seward. He was content to divide the laurels with them, and even compliments were bandied between them; while, in their hands, poetry continued to carry on a strange immigration into the regions of science. Steam-engines boiled in song; and flowers wooed and won each other according to the most approved doctrines of their high-priest, Linnæus. Wedgwood was immortalised, together with all the patterns of his exquisite porcelain; and Lunardi ascended in his parachute to the music of heroic verse. In short, by a series of inverted rules applied to the art, whatever had been previously the favourite subjects for embellishment, from the days of Hesiod and Homer downwards, were utterly neglected; that subjects,

which had never been before supposed capable of poetical embellishment, might be attempted. Like all ingenious novelties, the system for a while attracted attention, and gained disciples, until it was carried to degrees either of monstrosity or silliness perfectly intolerable. The Laura Matildas, the Mrs Robinsons, and Bertie Greatheads, and Merrys, and Westons, and Parsons, and the rest of the Della Cruscan school, the rough-knuckled Gifford demolished in a twinkling, and pilloried them in the "Mæviad and Baviad;" while Hookham, Frere, and Canning, in the "Anti-Jacobin," did the same good turn to the poetical votaries of science, by "The Loves of the Triangles."

Although the lights of Rogers, Bowles, Crabbe, Campbell, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, had already, at the close of last century, begun to irradiate the literary hemisphere, we find that the stars then nearest the zenith were Darwin, Hayley, and Cowper—that of the last-mentioned being, as it deserved, strongly and steadily in the ascendant. A greater perhaps still—Robert Burns—had just untimeously set; but the universality of fame which was thereafter for ever to attend that miracle of human nature, was as yet but slowly irradiating from a local centre:—

"First the banks of Doon beheld it,  
Then his own land formed its span,  
Ere the wide world was its empire,  
And its home the heart of man."

In Robert Burns, poetry showed itself no longer a weak nursling, like cresses reared on flannel floated on water, but a healthy plant springing from the soil, and redolent of its racy qualities. He wrote not from the mere itch of writing, but from the fulness of inspiration; and, coming from the heart, his poetry went to the heart. Much, therefore, as we owe to Cowper, yet probably more—although in a more indirect way—we



owe to the author of "Tam O'Shanter," "Hallowe'en," and "The Cottar's Saturday Night;" for, although successors caught his manly tone, his manner and subjects must have remained for a considerable period, to the English reader, matters of mere admiration and wonder. Burns threw himself unreservedly upon domestic life, and triumphantly showed that the morally sublime might be united to the extrinsically humble; thus proving—long before Wordsworth's day—that humanising sentiment could be extracted from the daisy beneath his feet, as well as ennobling emotions from

"The lingering star with lessening ray,"

that ushers in the light of the morn. "The fire," as James Montgomery has finely said, "which burns through his poems was not elaborated, spark by spark, from mechanical friction in the closet. It was in the open field, under the cope of Heaven, this poetical Franklin caught his lightnings from the cloud as it passed over him; and he communicated them too by a touch, with electrical swiftness and effect."

The popularity of Hayley in an age so artificial and so pragmatistical as that wherein he flourished—an age of minuets, and hoops, and pomatum, and powdered queues, and purple-velvet doublets, and flesh-coloured silk stockings—is not much to be wondered at, when we consider the subjects on which he wrote, and the real graces of his style. Such poetry was relished, because it was called forth by the exigencies, and adapted to the taste, of the particular time at which it was written. It was a reflection of existing modes and habits of thought; and it must be allowed that his mastery over versification was of no common order. True it is, that his mawkish or overstrained sentiment might at times expose him to ridicule; but the praise he received from Cowper is a strong proof of the influence which his writings at that time exercised over

society. That power and that popularity have now alike utterly passed away, for he was deficient in truth and nature; his house was built on the sand; and, except the case of Churchill, it would be difficult to point out another whose reputation had assumed so much the aspect of a fixed star, and yet only proved "the comet of a season."

Anna Seward, yeleft the Swan of Litchfield, was the Sappho of that era of ribbons and gumflowers, and a fitting one for such a Juvenal as Hayley, and such a Lucretius as Darwin. She wrote with fluency, and poured out a cataract of verse. Her elegies on Captain Cook and Major André, from the interest attached to the subjects, and the kind of electro-galvanic animation which characterised her compositions, attracted general attention, and ran successfully the round of popularity. With equal adaptation to the prevailing tastes, Paul Whitehead wore the laurel crown; and, mounted on his spavined Pegasus, duly chaunted his New Year and Birthday Odes, according to the terms of the statute.

As nothing in reference to literature, except what is founded on truth and nature, can be expected to be permanent—and as Darwin, Hayley, and the Litchfield coterie were deficient in both—so their triumph was an evanescent one. It has been well said, that "the poetry of Darwin was as bright and transient as the plants and flowers that formed the subject of his verse." He had fancy, command of language, varied metaphor, and magniloquent versification; but the want of nature marred all; and although his bow was bent occasionally with nervous strength, and always with artistic skill, yet his arrows fell pointless to the earth. He had no repose, no passion; and consequently his poetry alike palled on the ear and failed to touch the heart. He had the power to astonish and to dazzle, but lacked that tenderness necessary to create sympathetic interest, and without which the other is but a tinkling cymbal.

In matter and in manner, the Lake and Darwinian schools of poetry are the very antipodes of each other—hostile in every doctrine, and opposed in every characteristic. The extreme radical error of the former consists in the debasing what is in itself essentially dignified and lofty, by meanness of style, triteness of simile, and puerility of description: it clothes Achilles once more in female habiliments, and sets Hercules to the distaff. The other endeavours (if I may be allowed the comparison) to buoy up the materials of prose into the regions of poetry, by putting them into an air-balloon, not expanded by the divine afflatus, but by hydrogenous gas; while the aëronaut, as he ascends, waves his embroidered flag, and scatters among the gaping crowds below gilded knick-knacks, tinsel-trinkets, and artificial flowers, amazingly like nature! The one reminds us of Cincinnatus throwing aside the ensigns of office, and withdrawing from the bustle of camps and cabinets to the tranquillity of his Sabine farm: the other to Abon Hassan in the Arabian Tales, transported from the tavern to the palace, when under the influence of a somniferous potion, and awaking amid the music of a morning concert, surrounded with the splendours of mock royalty.

Were it not for the similes, which are, however, too frequently pressed into the service, "The Botanic Garden" and "The Temple of Nature," with all their luxuriant description, splendid imagery, and pompous versification, would be the most tedious and uninteresting performances imaginable; "altogether flat, stale, and unprofitable." The subject-matter, abstractedly considered, wholly precludes pathos and sympathy—elements without which, in our critical opinion, poetry is a mere *caput mortuum*, and stripped of all fascination. We can easily conceive how Lucretius could construct a grand poem, "De Rerum Naturâ," and how the genius of Virgil could be suitably employed on "The Georgics;"

—rural sights and sounds continuing to exert those imaginative influences in the days of Thomson, Cowper, and Grahame, which they did in the patriarchal ages, alike when Isaac went forth to meditate at eventide, and when Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz; and which they will never, 'can never cease to exert, while human nature preserves its present constitution. Almost any subject may be invested with a poetical interest, although that interest is not prominently inherent in the thing itself, nor even in the associations immediately connecting themselves with it. Garth's "Dispensary," and Armstrong's "Art of Preserving Health," for instance, as well as the "Eclogues of Sannizarius" and "The Nurse of Tansillo," are essentially and intrinsically prosaic. That these writers have sprinkled a poetical garnish over them, alters not the case. Darwin had no faith in simplicity and nature; and he spoiled all his delineations "by gilding refined gold, and painting the lily;" while the faults and failures of Wordsworth and his followers, on the other hand, originated in equally vain attempts, either to dignify the intrinsically mean, or to decorate the hopelessly worthless.

For utilitarianism, as strictly applied to poetry, I have no liking. What possible end could be gained by describing the machinery of a cotton-mill, or the improvements on the steam-engine, in verse, that could not be better attained in prose? If Dr Darwin intended to excite pleasurable feelings in his readers, he might have unquestionably chosen a more appropriate subject; if instruction was his aim, verse ought not to have been his vehicle. We are told, indeed, that it is the design of "The Botanic Garden" "to enlist imagination under the banners of science, and to lead her votaries from the looser analogies that dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones which form the ratiocinations of philosophy." But the great end of poetry is here forgotten.

We look on, and are dazzled; but we have none of those emotions which either "entrance the soul and lap it in Elysium;" or that awaken "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." "The Loves of the Plants" are wholly different from "The Metamorphoses" of Ovid; because, in the latter, the transmutation is merely a secondary object, both in the eyes of the poet and in the estimation of the reader. As the hero or heroine falls off from all intellectual grandeur, and thereby ceases utterly to excite aught of moral sympathy, we are wholly indifferent, since the absurdity of transformation must take place, into what it may be—an animal, or a stone, or a flower. Swift and Prior have admirably travestied some of these stories; and in the "Baucis and Philemon," the former has with great naïveté adapted the classic fable to rural English manners, and turned his hospitable domestic pair into yew trees, which long remained objects of wonder:—

"Till once a Parson of our town,  
To mend his barn, cut Baucis down;  
At which 'tis hard to be believed  
How much the other tree was grieved,  
Grew scrubby, died a-top, was stunted;  
So the next Parson stubbed and brunt it."

Ovid, indeed, tells us that, when Ajax stabbed himself, his blood was turned into the violet. But this is only the supernatural winding up of a scene of human passion, full of nature, feeling, and heroic action. He has previously introduced us to the two great leaders who plead their claims before the assembled Grecian chiefs for the armour of Achilles. We are taught to listen to the applausive shouts of the soldiery, and to have our hearts touched with the eloquence of the champions, as either in turn recounts the services he has rendered to his country, and "his hair-breadth 'scapes by flood and

field." Of Darwin in his purest form take the following short specimen :—

“ Nymphs ! you disjoin, unite, condense, expand,  
 And give new wonders to the Chemist's hand ;  
 On tepid clouds of rising steam aspire,  
 And fix in sulphur all its solid fire ;  
 With boundless string elastic airs unfold,  
 Or fill the fine vacuities of gold ;  
 With sudden flash vitrescent sparks reveal,  
 By fierce collision from the flint and steel ;  
 Or mark with shining letters Kunkel's name  
 In the pale Phospor's self-consuming flame.  
 So the chaste heart of some enchanted maid  
 Shines with insidious light by love betrayed.  
 Round her pale bosom plays the young desire,  
 And slow she wastes with self-consuming fire.”

Here is science united to poetry with a vengeance ! Now, we maintain that the passage has no title whatever to the latter appellation, save for the simile so strangely conveyed in the last four lines, which carries us back from dry art to images of natural beauty.

The parts of Darwin's writings worthy of admiration (and the finer portions are well worthy of it) are, without an exception that strikes me, only those passages which are subsidiary to the main objects of his poetry, and introduced by way of apostrophe or illustration. We do not think of the *Digitalis purpurea*, but of philanthropy and Howard ; we do not think of the embryo seeds, but of Herschel and the starry firmament ; not of the Carline thistle, but of the ascent of Montgolfier ; not of the Orchis, but of Eliza and the battle of Minden ; not of the vegetable poisons, but of the desolation of Palmyra. Incongruity, instead of being disclaimed by, seems a favourite axiom of Darwin and his school—subjects hopelessly prosaic being artificially stilted into eminence, and loaded with epithet and embellishment. If a beggar were to be introduced, it would be in a tattered lace-

coat, and he would ride to the lower regions—down the “*facilis descensus Averni*”—on a broken-kneed horse ; and, if a “slaughterer of horned cattle,” he would, after stalking through the shambles like a dancing-master, apostrophise his slain bullock in the fashion of Mark Anthony over Cæsar. As, with persons technically termed *fine* singers, sense is sacrificed to sound, so there is with the Darwinians no solicitude about the sentiment, provided you have the tones ; and intrinsic beauty is unhesitatingly buried beneath the gorgeous glitter of external drapery. When a Grecian matron is brought before you, instead of the robes of snowy white and the elegance of simplicity, you have her cheeks bedaubed with rouge, her ringlets filleted with embroidered ribbon, a tinselled cincture about her waist, and a scarf of purple thrown over her shoulders. In fact, you are invited to a mere scenic exhibition—a panorama of picturesque and fanciful objects—where you have the soft and the rugged, the Bay of Naples and Loch Lomond by moonlight, alternating with the Devil’s Bridge and the whirlpool of Corryvreckan. It is never thus with the really great poet. In him, fancy and feeling are found combined ; and, although all the varieties of actual life, and all—

“ The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley he has viewed,  
Yet impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.”

He looks, indeed, on the beauties of the external world on all the aspects of nature, with a gifted and a gladdened eye ; but this does not prevent him from making the springs of action, the secrets of the inner man, all that elevates or depresses the human heart, “the haunt and the main region of his song.”

To the artistic artificial school of Darwin, Seward, Hayley, and the Della Cruscan, may be said to have succeeded the purely romantic one—of which Matthew

Gregory Lewis ought to be set down as the leader, and John Leyden, Walter Scott, Coleridge, Southey, James Hogg, Mrs Radcliffe, Anna Maria Porter, and Anne Bannerman, as the chief disciples. The germ of their tenets must be traced back to the North, rather than to the ballads and romances of Percy, Ritson, and Ellis; and their demonology throughout savours much more of the Teutonic than either the Saxon or Celtic. The unsettling of men's minds by the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, among the French—and the new order of things created by the dangerous philosophising of the Academicians, and by Kant, Schelling, and the German transcendentalists—combined to bring about a new era, in which were rekindled all the magical and mystic reminiscences of the dark ages. Horace Walpole had written his "Castle of Otranto" merely as a burlesque; but, hitting the tone of the day, it had been read and relished as an admirable transcript of feudal times and Gothic manners; and his success taught Mrs Radcliffe and others to harp—and far from unpleasantly—on the same string. "Clarissa Harlowe" and "Pamela," quietly located on the book-shelves, had for a while their "virtue unrewarded," even by a reading; and nothing went down but "Udolphos" and "Romances of the Forest," "Sicilian Bravos," and "Legends of the Hartz Mountains;" corridors and daggers, moonlight and murdering, ruined castles and sheeted spectres, gauntleted knights and imprisoned damsels.

Three men of peculiar, two of them, indeed, of great imaginative strength at this time started up—Godwin, Coleridge, and Lewis; but it is with the last of them only that I have at present to do. As a man of truly original powers, M. G. Lewis was far behind either Godwin or Coleridge, and stood much on the level of his successor Maturin; but what his imagination lacked in grandeur was made up by energy: he was a high-priest of the intense school. Monstrous and absurd, in



many things, as were the writings of Lewis, no one could say that they were deficient in interest. Truth and nature, to be sure, he held utterly at arm's-length; but, instead, he had a life-in-death vigour, a spasmodic energy, which answered well for all purposes of astonishment. He wrote of demons, ghouls, ghosts, vampires, and disembodied spirits of every kind, as if they were the common machinery of society. A skeleton "in complete steel," or the spectre of "a bleeding nun," was ever at hand, on emergencies; and wood-demons, fire-kings, and water-sprites, gave a fillip to the external scenery. His "Monk," that strange and extramundane production, made the reader "sup so full of horrors," that mothers were obliged to lock it up from their sickly and sentimental daughters—more especially as its morale was not of the choicest; and when Lewis took a leap from the closet to the stage, his power was equally felt. I yet remember, when a boy, trembling in the very theatre, at the scene in "The Castle Spectre" which brings the murdered maiden on the stage; and if productions are to be judged by their effect, that drama, like "The Robbers" of Schiller, has left on facile imaginations traces never to be obliterated. The "Tales of Wonder," and the "Tales of Terror," succeeded; some of them stories of amazing vigour—wild, extravagant, unnatural—but withal highly readable, nay, occasionally of enchaining interest. In spirit, Lewis was a thorough convert to the raw-head-and-bloody-bones and the trap-door German school; and his thoughts were ever away amid the Hartz Mountains, seeing "more spirits than vast hell could hold." His every night was Hallowe'en, or a Walpurgis Night; and he is said to have become, in his latter years, the dupe of his own early over-excited feelings, and as sincere a convert to a frequent infringement of the established laws of physics, as Mrs Crowe in her "Night Side of Nature," or the Baron von Reichenbach himself,

with his Odylic light. He conjured up ghosts to affright others, and came to be haunted by them himself—a most natural retribution.

Most of the writers of the "Tales of Wonder" were young men of enthusiastic temperament, panting for distinction; and in their contributions they gave vivid indications of what, in maturer years, was to accomplish greater and better things. Lewis himself had an exquisite ear for versification, as demonstrated in his "Durandarte," and "Alonzo the Brave"—of which latter, "The Fire-King" of Smith, in "The Rejected Addresses," was a legitimate and scarcely extravagant burlesque. In "The Eve of St John," and "Glenfinlas," Walter Scott exhibited the glorious dawn of that day, whose transcendent meridian was to irradiate the world in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," in "Marmion," and in "The Lady of the Lake." Leyden poured out his whole rough strength in "Lord Soulis," and the "Mermaid of Corryvreckan." Southey forestalled his "Madoc" and "Roderick" in "Mary, the Maid of the Inn," "Donica," "Rudiger," "The Old Woman of Berkeley," and "Lord William"—the last thoroughly exquisite. While, although published elsewhere, Coleridge displayed wild and wondrous fruits from the same Hesperides in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the "Tale of the Dark Ladie," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan."

I repeat, however, that Lewis was a man rather of enthusiastic temperament than of high and sustained imagination. He could not face the sunlight and the clear blue sky; he required clouds and tempest, a howling wind and a troubled sea. He was what the vulture is to the eagle, what the leopard is to the lion, what the scene-painter is to the artist. His plays are what melodramas are to tragedy; and the terrors of his poetry trench as much on the burlesque as on the sublime; yet so great were the effects he produced, more

especially in his prose romances, and so unbounded was their popularity, that the mighty Minstrel, then a young man, confessed to have looked up to him with an admiration bordering on awe, and even deferentially submitted to be schooled by him in the art of versification.

Like the school of Darwin, that of Lewis was destined to have a day fully as remarkable for its brevity as its brightness. The readers of "The Feudal Tyrants," "The Monk," "The Tales of Terror," "The Isle of Devils," and "The Castle Spectre," became surfeited with perpetually dining on high-spiced curries, and began to long for a little "plain potato and salt." His spirit-world was neither the spirit-world of Milton in his "Paradise Lost" and his "Comus;" nor of Shakspeare in his "Hamlet" and "Macbeth;" nor of Spenser in his "Faery Queen." It was not the spirit-world of the Greek drama, which Æschylus and Euripides never ventured into, save in search of an avenging Nemesis, worthy of some awful occasion—transcendent misery, or transcendent guilt. On the contrary, the exceptions, with Lewis, were all on the other side, and were made the rule. Every one is bamboozled about the nature of everything he either hears or sees. What we take for a knight may be the foul fiend in *incognito*. Every third house is haunted; every second old woman is a witch; each tree has an owl; the moon is in conspiracy with the stars to blight the earth, on which they shed a malign influence; and thunder is ever at hand, with copious streams of blue zig-zag lightning. The noises on the wind are the howling of spirits; the skeleton of a murderer dangles in chains at every cross-road; very many chambers are particularly dark, grotesquely wainscotted, have secret doors, and are disturbed by the death-tick; while all the ponderous mail-studded gates hideously creak on their rusty hinges. In short, man, instead of being a prosaic payer of poor-rates and property-tax, is

made to inhabit a land of enchantments ; where ogres tyrannise in castles, and dragons spout fire in caves ; and where all the accredited Aristotelian elements—fire, air, earth, and water—are continually reverberating to each other—

“ Black spirits and white,  
Blue spirits and grey—  
Mingle, mingle, mingle,  
Ye that mingle may ! ”

The hideousness, the monstrosity, the exaggeration of this style of writing, combining and amalgamating with the perturbed temper of the times, gave it an acceptability and a fascination which it probably would not have otherwise acquired. At its acme it caught hold also of our most powerful cotemporary prose, in the “St Leon” of Godwin ; it was reflected in the “Canterbury Tales” of Sophia and Harriet Lee, in the “Frankenstein” of Mrs Shelley, and the “Melmoth” of Maturin, and died away into a gentler and more graceful spirituality in the “Rip Van Winkle” and “Headless Hessian” of Washington Irving, the “Vanderdecken’s Message Home” of John Howison, and “The Metempsychosis” of Robert Macnish. As the sacrifices of the high-priest ceased to ascend, the worshippers gradually deserted the mouldy shrine ; the younger devotees—Scott, Southey, Coleridge, and Leyden—took, in the maturity of intellect, to higher and more legitimate courses—forsook the melodrama for veritable tragedy and comedy, and, doffing the masquer’s robes, endeavoured “to look melancholy like gentlemen.” To accelerate their flight from this debatable land, the bow of ridicule was also bent against them. Jeffrey let fly a few sharp arrows ; and the “Water Fiends” of George Colman the younger, as well as the burlesques of Horace Smith, will long be remembered as exquisite pleasantries.

From Monk Lewis and his coterie we pass, by contrast—for strict chronological accuracy in this outline sketch is nearly impracticable—to the poetry of Kirke White, which appeared in 1803, and to “The Sabbath” of James Grahame, which was published anonymously in 1804.

I am very willing to admit that something of the interest attachable to the name of Kirke White may be traced to the entrancing piece of biography prefixed to his “Remains” by Southey; but, assuredly, not all. During late years an attempt has been made to under-rate the young poet, apparently from the feeling that he had received more than his due modicum of praise. This is, in my opinion, alike ungenerous and unjust; and it is a depreciation in which I cannot conscientiously concur; for, depend upon it, the poetry which has commanded the sympathies of a very large circle of readers through half a century cannot be destitute of some rare merit. No such permanent temple of fame, as that which Kirke White has reared, was ever built on sand. He possessed the poetical temperament in a higher measure than any other English poet who has immaturely died, except Chatterton, Keats, and, perhaps, Michael Bruce; and, from utter juvenility, so steady was his upward progress towards excellence, that, when we turn from “Clifton Grove,” to the fragmentary “Christiad,” it is impossible to predicate what achievement could have been beyond his maturer grasp. His verses “To an Early Primrose” would not have disgraced Collins; and his lyric on the “Herb Rosemary” has a melody and melancholy flow peculiarly his own. Most of his compositions, it must be confessed, were almost necessarily unequal or imperfect; but they are seldom poor, either in conception, language, or imagery. On the contrary, his imagination not seldom approaches the great, as in his “Shipwrecked Solitary’s Song to the Night;” in several passages of

his unfinished poem, entitled "Time;" in his "Thanatos" and "Athantos;" and his "Churchyard Song of the Consumptives." It is curious that so much of his verse should have been devoted to the scenery and sounds of night; and from this circumstance it derives much of its characteristic melancholy, solemnity, and wildness. To say that his versification is correct and fluent, and that he had pleasing powers of fancy and description, is saying what is true, but by no means saying enough. Added to these qualifications, he exhibited at least the blossoms of far higher endowments, which could scarcely have failed maturing into correspondent fruit. Many detached passages could be pointed out, which indicate that the torch of his inspiration was certainly kindled at the inner shrine; but it was darkly destined that his fair dawn was to have no meridian; and with a heart full of youthful promise, and of lofty aspirations—devoted to the noblest and purest objects of humanity—he died while his feet were yet on the threshold of manhood. Three, at least, of the great magnates of literature lamented his fate, and were loud in his praises. On examining his posthumous papers, Coleridge and Southey alike expressed their astonishment at so much genius united to so much industry; and Byron, in a truculent satire, wherein almost nobody was spared, truth-stricken, suspended the lash, to scatter flowers liberally on his early grave.

The career of James Grahame differed in many things from this; but it was almost equally striking. In the leisure allowed by his law studies, silently and secretly, and with the nervous and not unnecessary dread of evil consequences to the future prospects of his young family—being already a married man—Grahame penned "The Sabbath." Even his publishers knew not the author whose manuscript had been submitted to them. It was strictly anonymous; and although for several months it attracted little notice, the poem ultimately attained

a wide and well-deserved popularity. I have seen (through the kindness of my friend, Mr David Laing) the first edition of Grahame's celebrated poem, which is a thin duodecimo of ninety-six pages, and wants several of its now most prominent and characteristic features—as the accounts of the English baptismal service, and the Sunday in the prison hall—of the culprit under sentence of death—and of the emigrant's singing "by Babel's Streams," "amid Columbia's Wildernesses vast." The invocations to War, and to the Spirit of Tell—the passages relating to Wallace, Bruce, and Douglas—and the apostrophes to Health and to Music, towards the termination of the poem, are all, also, among the subsequent additions.

The subject of Grahame's poem, and the manner in which he treated it, commanded the sympathies and went directly to the heart of the Scottish nation. Among its finest passages are its opening picture, descriptive of the "hallowed stillness of the Sabbath morn;" the account of the Covenanter's Sabbath in the troubled times of old, when—

"The lyart veteran heard the word of God  
By Cameron thundered, or by Renwick poured  
In gentle stream;"

the reveries of the heart-broken man meditating suicide far in moors remote; the sketch of the Debtor in prison, as—

"even there  
The Sabbath sheds a beam of bliss, though faint;  
————— the blossoming pea  
That climbs the rust-worn bars seems fresher tinged;  
And on the little turf, this day renewed,  
The lark, his prison-mate, quivers the wing  
With more than wonted joy;"

and of the shipwrecked mariner—

“Cast on some desert island of the main  
Immense, which stretches from the Cochin shore  
To Acapulco.”

The blank verse of Grahame has some resemblance in structure to that of Cowper and of Wordsworth; but, as an artist, he was much inferior to and wants the correctness of either. Whether this arose from deficiency of ear—which could not well be, as he is said to have sung the ballads and songs of our native land mellifluously, and with a touching tenderness—or from some preconceived conviction of its effect in preventing monotony, we have ever, here and there, a line that halts, or that grates prosaically on the ear, like an instrument out of tune. His pages are never lighted up with wit or humour; and it has been objected to him, that he is too uniformly tender or solemn. It was for this that Lord Byron, in the wantonness of youthful satire, dubbed him “the Sepulchral Grahame;” but the epithet was truthless, and fell into oblivion. Indeed, nothing could be more unmerited, and it came with a peculiarly ill grace from the author of “Verses on a Skull made into a Drinking Cup,” and the misanthropical “Epitaph on a Newfoundland Dog.” The genius of Grahame, as exhibited in “The Sabbath”—the first and best of his productions—in “The Sabbath Walks,” in the “Biblical Pictures,” in “The Rural Calendar,” in “The Birds of Scotland,” and in “The British Georgics,” is, on the contrary, characterised by that cheerfulness which seeks and sees beauty in all the aspects of creation, and finds delight in whatever is high, “holy, pure, and of good report.” This must be felt by every one capable of dissociating fanaticism from true religion; and of believing that Christianity and gloom, instead of being synonymous terms, are utterly irreconcilable and separated. That Grahame not only perceived, but deplored errors in the moral world, and in many of the usages of society, and that he indignantly



and pathetically inveighed against them, is true. No poet was in his nature more simple or sincere ; and his conscientiousness seemed relieved by his uttering his protest, alike against public and private vices. He was the more prompted to this, by the contrast he could not help instituting between the moral and the material worlds. From "the crimson spots i' the bottom of a cowslip," up to the Pleiades that glow "like fire-flies in a silver braid," everywhere around and above him, he could trace the finger of Deity ; and Creation was to him but one vast temple, in which, day and night, hymns of adoration and praise were being continually offered up.

That views of life and nature so sincere, so just, and so accordant with the divine spirit of Christianity, should have found for the writings of Grahame many admirers, is not to be wondered at. His popularity, however, must, for many reasons, be in a great measure confined to the country of his birth—for he was as strictly a national poet as Robert Burns ; his pictures of life and manners, his landscapes, his thoughts, habits, and peculiarities—nay, even his prejudices, are all Scottish. Although most of his after-life was spent in a more southern region, he could not forget his native land ; and she must not forget one who could thus express himself regarding her—

" And must I leave,  
 Dear land, thy broomy braes, thy dales,  
 Each haunted by its wizard stream, o'erhung  
 With all the varied charms of bush and tree ;  
 And must I leave the friends of youthful years,  
 And mould my heart anew, to take the stamp  
 Of foreign friendships in a foreign land,  
 And learn to love the music of strange tongues ?  
 Yes ! I may love the music of strange tongues,  
 And mould my heart anew, to take the stamp  
 Of foreign friendships in a foreign land ;

But to my parchèd mouth's-roof cleave this tongue,  
My fancy fade into the yellow leaf,  
And this oft-pausing heart forget to throb,  
If, Scotland ! thee and thine it e'er forget."

Passing over an anonymous juvenile poem, which he afterwards repudiated, but which is strongly marked with his peculiar beauties and defects, the earliest earnest composition of Grahame was a tragedy entitled "Mary Stuart"—a subject naturally attractive to a young Scottish poet. But his genius was utterly undramatic ; and, although it possesses some fine passages, it failed in commanding attention. "The Sabbath" appeared several years afterwards ; and, being the best, is deservedly the most popular of all his works. After two summers appeared "The Birds of Scotland," in which, conjoined with the main theme, we have most engaging developments and revelations of the poet's own tastes, feelings, opinions, and enjoyments ; episodes which, in fact, form the true charm of Grahame's writings. Among its more striking passages are the description of the shipwrecked Sailor-boy ; of the Cuckoo and its nest ; his denunciation of the callous spirit that would sweep away from the landscape the dwellings of the poor ; his lament for the rural groups shut up in the city garrets ; and his horror at the miseries entailed on the young by the manufacturing system—a theme in which he anticipates Wordsworth.

In "The British Georgics," the last and most ambitious of Grahame's productions, we have disappointment, less from the falling off in power, than from the unhappy selection of subject. Didactic themes are doubtful ones for verse ; because, in verse, ornament is essential to truth ; and we are apt to find the garnishing much more palatable than the dish itself. As to farming, especially—a practical art—we doubt not that the Greek husbandman would prefer his neighbour's experience to Hesiod's rules ; and, among the Romans,

Cato the Censor was more likely to be an authority than Virgil the poet. At all events, we know that the British agriculturist neglects James Grahame's "Georgics" for Henry Stephens' "Book of the Farm." The really useful lessons attempted to be conveyed in the various sections are almost necessarily and hopelessly prosaic; but many of the illustrative details are fine as poetry; and the painting of external nature, and of the seasons—legitimate themes for the muse—are full of effect and truthful beauty.

The following picture of the fearful persecutions and steadfast faith of the Covenanters, is in James Grahame's very best manner:—

“ With them each day was holy ; but that morn  
 On which the angel said ‘ *See where the Lord  
 Was laid,*’ joyous arose ; to die that day  
 Was bliss. Long ere the dawn, by devious ways,  
 O’er hills, through woods, o’er dreary wastes, they sought  
 The upland moors, where rivers, there but brooks,  
 Dispart to different seas. Fast by such brooks  
 A little glen is sometimes scooped, a plat  
 With greensward gay, and flowers that strangers seem  
 Amid the heathery wild, that all around  
 Fatigues the eye : in solitudes like these  
 Thy persecuted children, Scotia, foiled  
 A tyrant’s and a bigot’s bloody laws :  
 There, leaning on his spear, (one of the array  
 Whose gleam, in former days, had scathed the rose  
 On England’s banner, and had powerless struck  
 The infatuate monarch and his wavering host,)  
 The lyart veteran heard the word of God  
 By Cameron thundered, or by Renwick poured  
 In gentle stream : then rose the song, the loud  
 Acclaim of praise ; the wheeling plover ceased  
 Her plaint ; the solitary place was glad,  
 And on the distant cairn the watcher’s ear  
 Caught doubtfully at times the breeze-borne note.  
 But years more gloomy followed ; and no more

The assembled people dared, in face of day,  
 To worship God, or even at the dead  
 Of night, save when the wintry storm raved fierce,  
 And thunder-peals compelled the men of blood  
 To couch within their dens ; then dauntlessly  
 The scattered few would meet, in some deep dell  
 By rocks o'ercanopied, to hear the voice,  
 Their faithful pastor's voice ; he by the gleam  
 Of sheeted lightning oped the sacred book,  
 And words of comfort spake : over their souls  
 His accents soothing came—as to her young  
 The heathfowl's plumes, when, at the close of eve,  
 She gathers in, mournful, her brood dispersed  
 By murderous sport, and o'er the remnant spreads  
 Fondly her wings ; close nestling 'neath her breast,  
 They, cherished, cower amid the purple blooms."

In reference to the nationality of Grahame's first and best poem, "The Sabbath," Professor Wilson has beautifully observed, that—

"How still the morning of the hallow'd day !"

is a line that could have been uttered only by a holy Scottish heart. For we alone know what is indeed Sabbath silence—an earnest of everlasting rest. To our hearts, the very 'birds of Scotland' sing holily on that day. A sacred smile is on the dewy flowers. The lilies look whiter in their loveliness : the bush-rose reddens in the sun with a diviner dye ; and with a more celestial scent the hoary hawthorn sweetens the wilderness."

Grahame died in 1811, in his forty-ninth year, and his dirge was sung in fitting strains by his youthful friend and admirer, the future author of "The Isle of Palms" and "The City of the Plague."

We have mentioned that what Canning and Frere did for the Darwinians in "The Loves of the Triangles," and for the rabid Germanic school in "The Rovers," "The University of Gottingen," and "The Needy Knife-Grinder," Gifford did for the Litchfield coterie and the

Della Cruscans, in "The Mæviad and Baviad," and with a greater spice of savagery. All three were poets, and, as such, might have left enviable reputations; but Canning became orator and politician, and, by his transcendent talents, attained to the first rank. Frere took to diplomacy, in which he showed himself an adept—enlivening his leisure by those exquisite translations from the Spanish, which extorted the enthusiastic admiration of Scott; and by that extravaganza of the Pulci and Casti school, Whistlecraft's "Prospectus of a National Poem," which was the forerunner of the more pungent "Beppo" and "Don Juan" of Byron, and "The Mad Banker" of William Wastle. Gifford, who had less of wit and humour, but whose genius was more forcible and austere, took to editing and reviewing. He was alike able and erudite, severe, cynical, and uncompromising; but he possessed, strange to say, a vein of pathos; and his "Verses to Anna," and "On a Tuft of Early Violets," are remarkable not only for their graceful delicacy of sentiment, but for something at least akin to genuine tenderness.

Nearly about the time when this able and remarkable trio were demolishing the gimcrack edifices of those fustian-artificers, who played their fantastic tricks before the reading public with such self-complacency, a simple child of nature—worth them all thrice-told—was dragged from his shoemaking garret upon the stage, under the auspices of Mr Capel Loft. This was Robert Bloomfield, at that time thirty-two years of age, and whose modest manuscript had previously been submitted to and shunned by several booksellers. "The Farmer's Boy" had in its descriptions and sentiments the freshness of nature and the impress of truth. It was evident that the landscapes were "taken on the spot," and that the reflections flowed from the heart. The poem soon acquired, as it deserved, a wide-spread popularity, and secured for its author a niche in the shrine of his

country's literature. His other principal productions were, "Rural Tales," "The Banks of the Wye," "Wild-flowers," "News from the Farm," "Hazelwood Hall, a Drama," and "May-day with the Muses,"—each of which has some peculiar and distinctive excellencies, but all of the kind which first attracted attention to "The Farmer's Boy."

Beyond any example, save that of Clare, Bloomfield seemed to be a poet almost by intuition ; for in point of taste, melody, and accuracy, his early verses, composed without almost a glimpse of education, were never excelled by his after efforts. While a ragged boy, seated on the green bank beneath the wild rose-bush, watching the rooks in the cornfield, the young enthusiast had

"Looked on nature with a poet's eye ;"

and all its shows were deeply impressed on his heart and imagination. His great characteristics are, observation and truthfulness ; and hence his pictures have the accuracy of daguerreotypes. As Dryden said of Shakspeare, "he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature ; he looked inward and found her there." The same excellence appertains to his sketches of cottage-life. His swains were no Colins and Lubins, who, in red silk handkerchiefs and knee-smalls, tune the reed in Arcadian fashion, and lay down crooks, decorated with ribbon, to recount their hapless loves—according to the recipes of Shenstone—but sturdy unlettered Suffolk hinds, who shave only on Sunday mornings—who occasionally get muzzy in returning from the neighbouring fair or market, famous for its "Corn, horn, wool, and yarn," and, in consequence thereof, awake with queer headaches—who devoutly believe in ghosts, and occasionally mistake a donkey for one—who to nectar, "the drink of the gods," prefer mild home-brewed ; labour lustily from morning of Monday till eve of Saturday ; make love at once with sheepishness and

fervour ; think of themselves as Englishmen, and hold all other countries in the world cheap ; have affectionate hearts and small knowledge ; grow grey, unambitiously, on or near the spot where they were born, amid their children’s children, and then die—to be forgotten, like their long line of humble progenitors. Such delineations are rife in the “ Wild-flowers ” and “ Rural Tales,” amid which we find “ The Fakenham Ghost,” “ Market Night,” and “ The Miller’s Maid,” which are imbued not only with a sweet vein of rustic poetry, fresh and faithful as that of Allan Ramsay, but are valuable as reflected pictures of English country life and manners. Can anything be finer in their way than the lines, in “ News from the Farm,” descriptive of a blind child ?—

“ Where’s the blind child so admirably fair,  
 With guileless dimples, and with flaxen hair  
 That waves in every breeze ? He’s often seen  
 Beyond yon cottage wall, or on the green  
 With others, match’d in spirit and in size,  
 Health in their cheeks and rapture in their eyes.  
 That full expanse of voice, to children dear,  
 Soul of their sports, is duly cherish’d here.  
 And hark ! that laugh is his—that jovial cry—  
 He hears the ball and trundling hoop brush by,  
 And runs the giddy course with all his might—  
 A very child in everything but sight—  
 With circumscribed, but not abated powers,  
 Play, the great object of his infant hours.  
 In many a game he takes a noisy part,  
 And shows the native gladness of his heart ;  
 But soon he hears, on pleasure all intent,  
 The new suggestion, and the quick assent ;  
 The grove invites delight, thrills every breast  
 To leap the ditch, and seek the downy nest.  
 Away they start, leave balls and hoops behind,  
 And *one* companion leave—the boy is *blind*.  
 His fancy paints their distant paths so gay,  
 That childish fortitude awhile gives way ;

He feels his dreadful loss—yet short the pain—  
Soon he resumes his cheerfulness again.  
Pondering how best his moments to employ,  
He sings his little song of nameless joy,  
Creeps on the warm green turf for many an hour,  
And plucks, by chance, the white and yellow flower ;  
Smoothing their stems, while resting on his knees,  
He binds a nosegay which he never sees ;  
Along the homeward path then feels his way,  
Lifting his brow against the shining day,  
And, with a joyful rapture round his eyes,  
Presents a *sighing* parent with the prize !”

When we consider the circumstances under which the early poetry of Bloomfield was composed—in a bare grim garret, by a feeble-constituted man approaching middle life, and amid the fatigues of mechanical labour, which yet scarcely sufficed to satisfy the clamant necessities of a wife and three children—“The Farmer’s Boy” ought not to be regarded otherwise than as a wonderful production. Few are its errors in taste, either as to matter or manner ; and its style is simple, chaste, unaffected, nay, occasionally elegant. Bloomfield’s reading at this time must have been necessarily extremely limited—so he had few models to guide him ; but his ear seemed naturally attuned to the music of verse ; and his composition, if not so rich and varied, almost vies in harmony with that of Rogers and Campbell. Virtuous, simple-hearted, sober-minded, he died in 1823. Sad it is to think—nay, disgraceful to the age in which we live—that the clouds of poverty should have been allowed to hang around him to the very last ; and that sunshine, in the shape of that fame which gold cannot, and genius can alone purchase, now only “gilds the turf that wraps his grave.”

From circumstances almost as obscure and humble as those of Bloomfield, the son of a Roxburghshire peasant, John Leyden, fought his way to distinction as a poet



and scholar. His temperament was widely different from that of the author of “The Farmer’s Boy;” and all obstacles were made to give way to his energetic temperament and indefatigable industry. From editing old Scottish poems, he struck into the paths of original composition, and poured forth several Border ballads, which won the hearts of Lewis and Scott. The finest of these are, “The Elfin King,” “The Cout of Keeldar,” and “Lord Soulis.” Still finer as poetry, perhaps, are his “Mermaid of Corryvreckan,” his “Ode on visiting Flodden,” his “Portuguese Hymn to the Virgin,” and his “Sonnet to the Sabbath Morning,” which is said by some to have suggested Grahame’s chief work. “The Scenes of Infancy”—his most laboured and ambitious poetical effort—possesses many fine passages, and is characteristic and quite worthy of his genius. Many of its descriptions and illustrations linger on the memory of the reader, and must be original in their tone, as they remind us of nothing else. Among its happiest things are the “Invocation to the Ancient Harp of Teviotdale,” the “Reflections on the Eve of his Sister’s Burial,” the “Episode of Mary Scott, the Flower of Yarrow,” the “Description of the Eildon Hills at Sunset;” and, above all, the “Apostrophe to Aurelia,” at the conclusion of the first part:—

“Ah, dear Aurelia ! when this arm shall guide  
 Thy twilight steps no more by Teviot’s side—  
 When I to pine in Eastern realms have gone,  
 And years have passed, and thou remain’st alone—  
 Wilt thou, still partial to thy youthful flame,  
 Regard the turf where first I carved thy name,  
 And think thy wanderer, far beyond the sea,  
 False to his heart, was ever true to thee ?

Ah ! spare that tearful look—’tis death to see—  
 Nor break the tortured heart that bleeds for thee.

These eyes that still with dimming tears o'erflow,  
 Will haunt me when thou canst not see my woe;  
 For, sad as he that dies in early spring,  
 When flowers begin to blow, and birds to sing,  
 When Nature's joy a moment warms the heart,  
 And makes it doubly hard from life to part,  
 I hear the whispers of the dancing gale,  
 And fearful listen for the flapping sail,  
 Seek in these natal shades a soft relief,  
 And steal a pleasure from maturing grief.

Yes! in these shades this fond adoring mind  
 Had hoped in thee a dearer self to find,  
 While those dear eyes in pearly light that shine,  
 Fond thought! had borrowed manlier beams from mine.  
 Ah! fruitless hope of bliss that ne'er may be!  
 Shall but this lonely heart survive to me?  
 No! in the temple of my purer mind  
 Thine imaged form shall ever live enshrined,  
 And hear the vows to first affection due  
 Still breathed—for love that ceases ne'er was true."

When in India, Leyden translated many pieces from the Persic and Hindostanee, which may be ranked in merit with those of Sir William Jones. Perhaps the best are the "Lament for Rama," and "The Dirge of Tippoo Suldaun," both of which are pervaded by a majestic solemnity. His reputation as a poet, however, is mainly based on his ballads and his "Scenes of Infancy;" these being the most characteristic of his tastes, feelings, and powers. They are original and racy, and smack of the native Border soil. The genius of Leyden was intensely national; and throughout life he exhibited the energy of the sturdy Borderer. He died at Java in 1811, from pestilential fever, amid the delirium of which he was heard to sing snatches of gathering songs and foraying ballads. He was only in his thirty-sixth year when, as Sir Walter Scott in his "Lord of the Isles" pathetically laments—

“ His bright and brief career was o'er,  
 And mute his tuneful strains ;  
 Quenched was his lamp of varied lore,  
 That loved the light of song to pour—  
 A distant and a dismal shore  
 Has Leyden's cold remains !”

To this first section of our subject are also referable the poetical compositions of Charlotte Smith and Amelia Opie. The sonnets of the former—who was an associate of Hayley and Cowper—were extensively popular in their day, and are characterised by musical versification, and by delicacy of sentiment, carried not seldom, however, to affectation. They were apt illustrations of the satirist's “ Fourteen Lines of Sensibility ;” and then—

“ The closing couplet of each sonnet  
 Shone like the cherry on a Highland bonnet.”

“ We allow,” says Sir Walter Scott, in his biography of this lady, “ high praise to the sad and sweet effusions of Mrs Smith's muse ; but we cannot admit that, by these alone, she could have risen to the height of eminence which we are disposed to claim for her as the authoress of her prose narratives.” The same may be said of Amelia Opie, although her lyrics of the “ Orphan Boy” and “ Forget Me Not” extorted the praise of Lord Jeffrey, and have, from their natural pathos, sufficient vitality in them to keep them popular favourites. Mrs Hunter struck a higher chord in her “ Cherokee Indian's Death-Song ;” while Mrs Grant, in her “ Highlanders and other Poems,” respectably assisted in sustaining the honours of the Scottish muse. None of these accomplished ladies, however, evinced the powers of imagination which shone out in the “ Psyche ” of Mrs Tighe—an adventurous and elaborate effort, full of power and beauty, which wanted only a little more artistic skill and concentration to have entitled it to a place among first-class productions.

Several other poets of merit—now little known, save by casual extract—did their best to illustrate the same period ; for, as Dr Johnson has characteristically observed, “Parnassus has its flowers of transient fragrance, as well as its trees of stately growth, and its laurels of eternal verdure.” Crowe’s “Lewisdon Hill,” Bidlake’s “Country Parson,” Gisborne’s “Walks in a Forest,” and Cottle’s “Malvern Hills,” were, as local poems, long admitted to the same library-shelf with the volumes of Denham and Dyer ; while the “Influence of Local Attachment,” by Polwhele, not only evinced considerable powers of thought and language, but gave indications of a higher excellence, which, however, the future efforts of the reverend author were not destined to fulfil. William Sotheyby particularly distinguished himself as a translator from the German, and William Roscoe from the Italian ; but, in their own compositions, the former wanted originality, and the latter—who was of the Hayley school—threws and sinews. Roscoe’s strength lay in another path—that of historical composition—wherein he achieved the eminence he deserved. Sotheyby was never great, except when treading in some beaten path. His “Saul,” an epic poem, and his “Constance de Castille,” a romance in the manner of Scott, as well as his “Italy,” a descriptive poem, contain each fine and spirited passages ; but even these are almost always reflections of what has attracted his own particular admiration in others. As a translator, it would be difficult to name his superior. He had the good sense to discover that his great forte lay in the transfusion of ideas from one language into another ; and he not only enthusiastically, but industriously, employed himself in thus enriching English literature. Wieland himself acknowledged the spirit and accuracy which pervaded his version of “Oberon ;” his “Georgics” called forth the admiration of Jeffrey ; and his “Iliad” and “Odyssey,” alike in elegance and

correctness, were placed by Professor Wilson at the head of all our translations of Homer. With three such testimonials for his epitaph, it cannot be said that Sotheby, as a literary labourer, lived in vain.

Without any disparagement to Darwin or Hayley, to Lewis or Leyden, to Grahame or Kirke White, to Canning, or Frere, or Gifford, or Bloomfield, or other of the poets just adverted to, a far greater now comes before us in the author of "The Village," "The Parish Register," and the "Lyrical Tales." George Crabbe emerged from an obscurity scarcely less hopeless than that of the author of "The Farmer's Boy"—certainly more so than that of Robert Burns. The details of his infancy and boyhood are such as to weigh on the heart like a very nightmare—an utter hopelessness seemed to environ him; but the Cyclops was not even thus to be shut up in his cave. Through a more than Cretan labyrinth of doubt and dismay and darkness, he battled his way over all obstacles forwards to the open day; and his works are now, and for ever, a prominent and a distinctive portion of our literature. Crabbe is alike the Teniers and the Wilkie of our poets. He was not unfelicitously designated by Sir Walter Scott "the British Juvenal;" and Lord Byron characterises him as "Nature's sternest painter, but her best."

It is not my purpose to interfere at all with the strange and striking biography of George Crabbe, or to record the early struggles under which most would have sunk despairing, but which at length terminated in his introduction to Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson, and in the publication, first of "The Library," and then of "The Village"—poems which, for their raciness and originality of manner, as well as truthful description, attracted immediate notice. In them he did not show that confidence of composition which he afterwards did, when an author exulting in the exuberance of mature strength, and when possessed of a popularity

which licensed an occasional vagary ; but they contain passages which Crabbe himself never afterwards excelled—his description of a “Parish Workhouse” being as likely to endure as any equal number of couplets in British literature.

Crabbe now settled down into a parish clergyman, the duties of which from that time till his death—half a century afterwards—he most faithfully and assiduously performed. For a great number of years his voice was unheard ; but, happily for literature, the fire of his inspiration had been only stifled up, not extinguished, and was yet to break forth more brilliantly. “The Village” was published in 1783 ; and it was not until 1807, after a lapse of twenty-four years, that he again appeared as a poet in his “Parish Register”—certainly one of the most characteristic of his writings, whether we regard subject or mode of handling. “The Borough” and “The Tales”—each marked by the same daring originality in matter and manner, and by the same very peculiar beauties and defects—followed within the succeeding five years, thoroughly winning for their author a place among the master spirits of his age. The last great work of Crabbe was the “Tales of the Hall,” which appeared in 1819, and exhibited no symptoms of falling off ; although in these his exhibitions of character are, for the most part, taken from higher grades of society than those in the depicting of which he had won his early laurels. A subsequent collection—but scarcely equal to these in merit, from not having received the master’s finishing touches, (for Crabbe, with all his seeming fluency and ease, was a great elaborator,)—appeared posthumously, under the able editorship of his son George.

If originality, if the striking out a new path, constitutes one of the highest claims to poetical excellence, few are entitled to stand in the same rank with Crabbe.

Indeed, it would be difficult to point to any prototype, either as regards his style or his subjects. The nearest approach I have met with to his sententiousness, is in the old, quaint, pointed satires of Dr Donne ; and something of his graphic truth and elaborate minuteness of description may be found in the verse of Chaucer, more especially "The Canterbury Pilgrims." But Crabbe added much—very much—which is unequivocally his own, and which acknowledges no borrowed lustre. His sea-side sketches are taken from observation ; they savour of the briny breeze and the sea-weed—of the decaying fish on the beach—of the tarry boat and its bilge-water,—and are not mere imaginary limnings like the "Piscatory Eclogues" of Sannazarius, or of Phineas Fletcher, where "Tom Bowling" figures as Thelgon, and "Black-eyed Susan" as Chromis. He "paints the cot as truth would paint it, and as bards would not." His pictures of humble life have none of the "Peter Pastoral" about them, and are invaluable as truthful contrasts to the Hobbinols and Diggin Davies of Spenser—to the Marinas and Dorydons of William Browne—the Molly Moggs and Evanders of Gay—the Damons and Daphnes of Pope—and the Corydons and Phyllises of Shenstone. These were all alike creatures of a cloudland Arcadia, moulded into any form or figure of the poet's imagination, and who might have pipes in their mouths, either for tobacco or music. Allan Ramsay is the only predecessor of Crabbe who approaches him in truth ; but the difference between their portraiture is as wide as that between the limnings of Titian and those of Rembrandt. Ramsay's is the Doric, and, as far as his sketches go, the real sunshiny Doric. Crabbe's landscapes take in a wider and much more varied range—the sandy sea-coast, and its stunted belts of woodland—the wide expanse of black, bleak moor, with its enlivening patches of cultivation—the umbrageous forest, with its tumbling and tossing

stream—and the green ascent of hills overlooking all these. He gives us the shade as well as the sunshine—the gloom as well as the glitter; nay, he seems to prefer Nature in her wintry to her summer aspects, and to paint men and manners in hues whose truth we are often called upon to deplore, while forced to acknowledge.

The characters of Crabbe are those of real and everyday life, not monsters of iniquity gorgeously decked out in silks and satins, like the heroes of Lord Byron; nor angelic visions of humanity, like many of the personages of Moore. They perform their parts, just as their prototypes do in the great world; but we fondly hope that a larger portion of their vices than of their virtues has been disclosed to us. He ransacks every lazar-house of the heart, and anatomises the very heart itself, with an unsparing scalpel. His forenoon's walk is amid the hovels of poverty, the abodes of guilt, of misery, and of wretchedness, where the thatch is rotting on the roof, and where the window, rudely patched with paper, "admits the tempest, yet excludes the day." Nothing is so insignificant as to escape his notice, from the ashes-heap and the miry kennel before the threshold, to the undisturbed and downy dust in the window-corner; from the fishing-rod or fowling-piece hung in the secret nook, to the fir-deal table, daubed with the glistening and glutinous streaks of last night's ale. So with the inmates—nothing in the outward man or woman escapes observation and chronicling, from the well-worn cap and kerchief to the pieced jacket, the old glazed hat, and the tattered shoes. He enumerates the very plants in their little gardens, and the succession of their yearly crops. Everything that relates to themselves, and to their fathers before them—what were their callings, and what their characters—the number of their sons and daughters, dutiful or rebellious—their respective ages—their qualifications and defi-



ciencies—the colour of their eyes, and the cut of their hair.

In Burns, poverty, from the fascination and heartiness of his pictures, is made to look almost like a piece of good fortune. It is associated with kindly simplicity, with proud patriotism, with devoted affection, with uncompromising independence. Pastoral and patriarchal integrity and uprightness are weighed in the balance with the precarious entrancements of luxury and refinement; and life, in its lowliness, is invested with a peculiar charm, which might be ill exchanged for the polish of rank, or the varnished hollowness of artificial manners. Such delineations we have in the “Hallowe’en,” in his “Epistles to his Brother Poets,” and in many of the immortal “Songs;” and who ever rose from “The Cottar’s Saturday Night” without a heightened glow of religious feeling, and without a proud conviction that the true glory of man is based, not on his mere transient external circumstances, but on his moral nature? Crabbe’s etchings are equally deep, but very different; and, unfortunately, I fear, not therefore a jot less faithful. In his poetry he reads us a stern and instructive lesson, by exhibiting to us the sinfulness of sin in the certain misery of its issues, while he endeavours to lower the pride of the human heart, by showing how often its motives originate in selfishness. The gloom of his pictures is, however, occasionally lighted up by redeeming traits, tending to show that, fallen though our nature may be, something of “the divinity yet stirs within us.” His episodes of “Phœbe Dawson” in the “Borough,” of “Ruth,” and of “Charles the Painter” in “Tales of the Hall,” and his tale of “Resentment,” where the hard-hearted wife allows the old man and his ass to shiver in the winter’s snow, overflow with touching tenderness; while the stories of “Peter Grimes” in “The Parish Register,” and of “Smugglers and Poachers” in “Tales of the Hall,” on the other

hand attest the harrowing power of his pencil, and weigh on the heart like a very nightmare.

As a short characteristic specimen of Crabbe's general manner, the following sketch may be fairly taken. It is of a gipsy's encampment :—

"Again, the country was enclosed, a wide  
 And sandy road has banks on either side ;  
 Where, lo ! a hollow on the left appeared,  
 And there a gipsy tribe their tent had reared.  
 'Twas open spread to catch the morning sun,  
 And they had now their early meal begun,  
 When two brown boys just left their grassy seat  
 The early traveller with their prayers to greet.  
 Within, the father, who from fences nigh  
 Had brought the fuel for the fire's supply,  
 Watched now the feeble blaze, and stood dejected by.  
 On ragged rug, just borrowed from the bed,  
 And by the hand of coarse indulgence fed,  
 In dirty patchwork negligently dressed,  
 Reclined the wife, an infant at her breast.  
 In her wild face some touch of grace remained  
 Of vigour palsied, and of beauty stained.  
 Her blood-shot eyes on her unheeding mate  
 Were wrathful turned, and seemed her wants to state,  
 Cursing his tardy aid : her mother there  
 With gipsy state engrossed the only chair.  
 Solemn and dull her look : with such she stands,  
 And reads the milk-maid's fortune in her hands,  
 Tracing the lines of life ; assumed through years,  
 Each feature now the steady falsehood wears.  
 With hard and savage eye she views the food,  
 And grudging pinches their intruding brood.  
 Last in the group the worn-out grandsire sits  
 Neglected, lost, and living but by fits ;  
 Useless, despised, his worthless labours done,  
 And half protected by the vicious son,  
 Who half supports him ; he, with heavy glance,  
 Views the young ruffians who round him dance ;

And, by the sadness in his face, appears  
 To trace the progress of their future years ;  
 Through what strange course of misery, vice, deceit,  
 Must wildly wander each unpractised cheat ;  
 What shame and grief, what punishment and pain,  
 Sport of fierce passions, must each child sustain—  
 Ere they, like him, approach their latter end,  
 Without a hope, a comfort, or a friend.”

On a key totally different is pitched the lyrical tale of  
 “Sir Eustace Grey.” Having shown Crabbe’s minute  
 graphic faithfulness, let us turn to his imaginative energy.  
 He is describing the visions of frenzy, and we have him  
 in the hour and the power of his poetic inspiration—

“Those fiends, upon a shaking fen,  
     Fixed me in dark tempestuous night ;  
 There never trod the feet of men,  
     There flocked the fowl in wintry flight ;  
 There danced the moor’s deceitful light,  
     Above the pool where sedges grow ;  
 And when the morning sun shone bright,  
     It shone upon a field of snow.

“They hung me on a bough so small—  
     The rook could build her nest no higher ;  
 They fixed me on the trembling ball  
     That crowns the steeple’s quivering spire ;  
 They set me where the seas retire,  
     But drown with their returning tide,  
 And made me flee the mountain’s fire,  
     When rolling from its burning side.

“I’ve hung upon the ridgy steep  
     Of cliffs, and held the rambling brier ;  
 I’ve plunged below the billowy deep,  
     Where air was sent me to respire ;  
 I’ve been where hungry wolves retire ;  
     And (to complete my woes) I’ve ran  
 Where bedlam’s crazy crew conspire  
     Against the life of reasoning man.

"I've furled in storms the flapping sail,  
   By hanging from the top-mast head ;  
 I've served the vilest slaves in gaol,  
   And picked the dunghill's spoil for bread ;  
 I've made the badger's hole my bed,  
   I've wandered with a gipsy crew,  
 I've dreaded all the guilty dread,  
   And done what they would fear to do.

"On sand where ebbs and flows the flood,  
   Midway they placed and bade me die ;  
 Propt on my staff, I stoutly stood  
   When the swift waves came rolling by ;  
 And high they rose, and still more high,  
   Till my lips drank the bitter brine :  
 I sobbed convulsed, then cast mine eye,  
   And saw the tide's reflowing sign."

As Crabbe exhibited the magnificence of his imagination in "Sir Eustace Grey," so did he the depth of his pathos in the "Hall of Justice," which hurries us on through scenes of surprise, horror, and infamy, to melt us into tears of compassion for contrite guilt.

The tales of Crabbe, considered merely as stories, are often meagre, desultory, and defective in construction—nay, occasionally trite and commonplace: his forte did not lie in novel combination of circumstances; for he had neither fertility of invention nor ingenuity of plot. They derive their interest, like the novels of Richardson and of Samuel Warren, from the aggregate impression of a series of seemingly trifling circumstances faithfully and elaborately chronicled. He laid not his pavement down in masses—he was a worker in mosaic.

Crabbe can scarcely be said to have looked on nature with the eye of a poet—he had little sympathy with the mere picturesque; and to him the romantic associated itself with the ridiculous. Sir Philip Sidney must have been an enigma to him, and Don Quixote chronicled

among stark lunatics. None of his compositions, save the grand lyrical ballad of "Sir Eustace Grey," show much of imagination—his fancy was rigidly kept under the dominion of reason; but confining himself to the palpable impressions of reality, he thence showed that "truth is, indeed, often stranger than fiction." Nothing is overlooked, although his microscopic eye takes in alike the mighty and the mean; and he seems occasionally to regard both with the same intellectual composure. That he preferred delineating the dark side of things seemed to arise from an idiosyncrasy of his genius. The poetical taste of Crabbe was founded on "The Deserted Village," on Pope, and Churchill; but the vigour and originality of his own intellect carried the boundaries of that school of writing into entirely new and untrodden regions. His heroic couplet has much more resemblance to that of Cowper than of any other poet—alternately sweet and harsh, classic and quaint, melodious and rugged. Between their minds there were not wanting several strong points of approximation; but Cowper was more hopeful—his muse delighted occasionally to catch the sunshine on its aspiring wings; and while Crabbe could only see sin and sorrow, selfishness and suffering, to the end of man's earthly chapter, Cowper lightened up his twilight dreams with visions of the Millennium. That Wordsworth adopted views of human nature quite antagonistic to those of Crabbe, will be shown, when I shall have occasion again to refer to him, in contrast with that other great master.

I must satisfy myself with having adverted to, rather than discussed, the varied and manifold merits of Crabbe—a man of peculiar talent, and of singular originality, but whose muse, except in two or three brief flights, never, as I have intimated, attempted the higher regions of poetry. Shortly after his time, three other true poets showed themselves in succession; and whom

I thus mention together, simply because they each seemed originally to have formed themselves on what appeared to have struck them as most deserving of admiration in the current literature of their boyhood—more especially the poetry of Goldsmith—for to him we owe those fresher impressions of nature, which distinguish “The Traveller” and “The Deserted Village” from “The Vanity of Human Wishes” of Johnson, “The Campaign” of Addison, and “The Windsor Forest” of Pope. The three writers whom I have thus somewhat forcibly brought together, were Samuel Rogers, Lisle Bowles, and James Montgomery. Bowles is now with the past, having died within the last twelvemonth, at the patriarchal age of ninety; Rogers and Montgomery, in advanced and honoured years, happily yet remain to us.

Samuel Rogers more immediately followed Crabbe—his first production, “The Ode to Superstition,” having appeared in 1786. It not only smacks of his peculiar genius, but is characterised by that elaboration for which all his subsequent writings are noted; but his reputation was not established until he gave to the world “The Pleasures of Memory,” a poem exquisite in conception and execution, combining a fine feeling of nature and a high tone of morality, with elegant scholarship, and a nicety of taste approaching to fastidiousness. Nor was it wonderful that it immediately rose into that popular favour which, after a lapse of sixty years, it still deservedly retains; for it is pervaded by beauty and grace of sentiment, and in versification approaches the perfection of art. Although its highest passages are not so high as the finest in “The Pleasures of Hope,” it is freer from traces of juvenility, and, with less of ardent enthusiasm, may be said to be better sustained throughout. Yet it also has its more prominent passages; and these, as it strikes me, are the twilight landscape with which it opens;

the introduction to the tale of Derwent Lake; the allusion to the Savoyard Boy leaving the Alps; the apostrophe to the Bee, as illustrative of the powers of memory; the affecting reference to a deceased brother; and the lines on Greenwich Hospital. The concluding paragraph is also apposite and beautiful:—

“Hail! Memory, hail! in thy exhaustless mine,  
 From age to age, unnumbered treasures shine;  
 Thought and her shadowy brood thy call obey,  
 And Place and Time are subject to thy sway;  
 Thy pleasures most we feel when most alone,  
 The only pleasures we can call our own.  
 Lighter than air Hope’s summer visions die,  
 If but a fleeting cloud obscure the sky;  
 If but a beam of sober reason play,  
 Lo! Fancy’s fairy frost-work melts away!  
 But can the wiles of Art, the grasp of Power,  
 Snatch the rich relics of a well-spent hour?  
 These, when the trembling spirit wings her flight,  
 Pour round her path a stream of living light;  
 And gild those pure and perfect realms of rest,  
 When Virtue triumphs, and her sons are blest!”

The “Epistle to a Friend,” which followed in 1797, was another working out of the same classic vein of thought, imagery, and sentiment—a little inferior, perhaps, in freshness, and a good deal so in general interest. Some of its descriptive sketches are elaborately fine, and not only graceful, but exquisite touches of nature sparkle throughout. A general straining after effect, however, is but too apparent; and, in spite of his own anathema against false taste, Rogers here occasionally reminds us of the scholar of Apelles, who, unable to paint his Helen beautiful, was determined to make her fine.

The “Fragments of a Voyage of Columbus” did not appear for a good many years after, and are of a higher cast than any of his former writings. A deep-toned solemnity pervades the whole, and occasionally we have

thoughts that verge on the sublime. But it can only be likened to snatches of a fine melody heard by summer sunset on the sea-beach, or transient glimpses of a magnificent landscape caught through clouds of white rolling mist.

The allusion to Columbus entering the vast Atlantic is full of solemn grandeur :—

"'Twas night. The moon, o'er the wide wave, disclosed  
Her awful face ; and Nature's self reposed ;  
When slowly rising in the azure sky,  
Three white sails shone—but to no mortal eye,  
Entering a boundless sea. In slumber cast,  
The very ship-boy on the dizzy mast  
Half breathed his orisons ! Alone unchanged,  
Calmly beneath, the great Commander ranged  
Thoughtful, not sad."

The work, however, fine as it is in detached portions, is too fragmentary, and rather stimulates curiosity than gratifies expectation.

"Jacqueline" is pitched on quite another and opposite key. It is far less ambitious, and seems an attempt to catch those natural evanescent domestic graces which lie beyond the reach of art. If so, it cannot be said to be quite successful ; for, with some touches of simple beauty, it is, to say the best of it, a faint and feeble performance—and, certes, at antipodes to the "Lara" of Byron, along with which it was originally published. The fastidiousness of Rogers must have ever rendered his success as a narrative writer more than doubtful. "What would offend the eye in a good picture, the painter casts discreetly into shade ;" but Rogers would not only have done this, but have blotted out everything save beauties alone, of which, exclusively, no landscape, however fine, can be formed.

Like Dryden, and very unlike the majority of poets, Rogers gradually went on, surpassing himself as he



grew older ; for his “ Human Life ” and his “ Italy ” are his best works. In the former we have, along with much of the same mellow colouring and delicacy of conception which distinguished “ The Pleasures of Memory,” the outpourings also of a richer and deeper vein of feeling—a contemplation more grounded on experiences. Even more than its precursor, “ The Pleasures of Memory,” it has all the high finish of a cabinet picture. “ Italy,” to our mind, however, is the freshest and finest of all the compositions of its author—the one most unequivocally his own ; and the one whose passages most frequently recur to mind, from their peculiar graces of style and language. Its blank verse is not that of Milton, or Thomson, or Akenside, or Cowper, or Wordsworth. It is pitched on a less lofty key than any of these—nay, occasionally almost descends to a conversational tone, but without ever being commonplace in thought, or lax in diction. It is full of the easy elegance of the author’s mind, and forms an admirable vehicle for those delightful glimpses of Ausonian life and natural scenery, which he has tinted with that exquisite grace inseparable from his pencil. Several of its descriptions, as those of Pæstum, of the Great St Bernard, and of Venice, are inimitable ; and its episode of Ginevra touches on a hidden spring, which finds a response in every heart.

I know not which is more exquisite, her picture or her story. The first is a Sir Peter Lely in words :—

“ She sits, inclining forward as to speak,  
 Her lips half open, and her finger up,  
 As though she said, ‘ Beware !’ Her vest of gold,  
 Broidered with flowers, and clasped from head to foot—  
 An emerald stone in every golden clasp ;  
 And on her brow, fairer than alabaster,  
 A coronet of pearls. But then her face,  
 So lovely, yet so arch, so full of mirth,

The overflowings of an innocent heart ;—  
 It haunts me still, though many a year hath fled,  
 Like some wild melody."

Now for the latter :—

"She was an only child—her name Ginevra,—  
 The joy, the pride of an indulgent father :  
 And in her fifteenth year became a bride,  
 Marrying an only son, Francesco Doria,  
 Her playmate from her birth, and her first love.

Just as she looks there in her bridal dress,  
 She was all gentleness, all gaiety,  
 Her pranks the favourite theme of every tongue.  
 But now the day was come, the day, the hour ;  
 Now frowning, smiling, for the hundredth time,  
 The nurse, that ancient lady, preached decorum ;  
 And, in the lustre of her youth, she gave  
 Her hand, with her heart in it, to Francesco.

Great was the joy ; but at the nuptial feast,  
 When all sate down, the bride herself was wanting.  
 Nor was she to be found ! Her father cried,  
 "'Tis but to make a trial of our love !'  
 And filled his glass to all ; but his hand shook,  
 And soon from guest to guest the panic spread.  
 'Twas but that instant she had left Francesco,  
 Laughing, and looking back, and flying still,  
 Her ivory tooth imprinted on his finger.  
 But now, alas ! she was not to be found ;  
 Nor from that hour could anything be guessed,  
 But that she was not !

Weary of his life,  
 Francesco flew to Venice, and, embarking,  
 Flung it away in battle with the Turks.  
 Orsini lived ; and long might you have seen  
 An old man wandering as in quest of something—  
 Something he could not find—he knew not what.  
 When he was gone, the house remained awhile  
 Silent and tenantless, then went to strangers.

Full fifty years were past, and all forgotten,  
 When on an idle day, a day of search,

'Mid the old lumber in the gallery,  
 That mouldering chest was noticed ; and 'twas said,  
 By one as young, as thoughtless as Ginevra,  
 'Why not remove it from its lurking-place ?'  
 'Twas done as soon as said ; but on the way  
 It burst, it fell ; and lo ! a skeleton,  
 With here and there a pearl, an emerald-stone,  
 A golden clasp, clasping a shred of gold.  
 All else had perished—save a wedding-ring  
 And a small seal, her mother's legacy,  
 Engraven with a name, the name of both,  
 'Ginevra.'

There then had she found a grave !  
 Within that chest had she concealed herself,  
 Fluttering with joy, the happiest of the happy ;  
 When a spring-lock, that lay in ambush there,  
 Fastened her down for ever !”

Whatever portion of the writings of Samuel Rogers may die, this tale cannot. His minor poems are all elaborately graceful and elegant ; but, save in one or two instances, possess little originality, and never once rise into lyrical grandeur. The best are “The Alps at Daybreak,” “To the Torso,” the “Lines written in the Highlands of Scotland,” and the “Verses in Westminster Abbey.”

The reader of Rogers ever finds that he is on secure ground, that his author is in earnest, and that his afflatus is the true inspiration. The feast spread for him has all the marks of cost and care : it is the result of choice study, of nice observation, of fine feeling, of exquisite fancy, of consummate art ; and the exuberances of the mere bard are everywhere toned down by the graceful tact of the scholar. Among great or original minds Rogers scarcely claims a place—nay, his genius may not seldom be said to glow with something of a reflected light ; but, in this age of slovenly prolixity, where elaboration is held at a discount, and volume

after volume, sparkling with something good, is poured forth in its crudity, only to be sighed over and forgotten, I look upon his example of elegance and correctness as quite invaluable.

Bowles was an inferior artist to Rogers, although taste and elegance are also the chief features of his poetry. His early reputation was founded on his sentimental and reflective verses; and these may still be ranked among his happier efforts. Probably, from old associations, I have a sort of lurking fondness for his "Grave of Howard," his "Abba Thule," and "The Elegy at Matlock," which their intrinsic merits may not quite entitle them to; but more certain I am that "St Michael's Mount" and "Coombe Ellen" are two descriptive poems of high merit, whether regarded as the genial outpourings of youthful enthusiasm, or as elegant and tasteful specimens of versification. The "Sonnets," through many years, however, were the sheet-anchors of Bowles's fame; and fine though some of them must be admitted to be, it is yet difficult to account for the impression which assuredly—because we have it from spontaneous personal confession—they made on minds much more lofty and vigorous in imagination than his own. Coleridge had them by heart; and not only made forty autograph copies of them for his particular friends, but declared himself "enthusiastically delighted and inspired by them:" while in the recently published "Life of Robert Southey," by his son Cuthbert, we find him also saying, in a letter to their author, that "there are three contemporaries, the influence of whose poetry on my own I can distinctly trace—Sayers, yourself, and Savage Landor. I owe you something, therefore, on the score of gratitude." Bowles requires no higher credentials for the legitimacy of his mission; for no uninspired poet ever inspired others. That the flames from a small, rude Indian wigwam may carry conflagration to

a whole district-embowering prairie, is quite another matter; the kindling spark alone is wanted—and in poetry genius is that sole desiderated spark. Southey and Coleridge acknowledge having borrowed fire from Bowles to ignite their tinder—*ergo*, Bowles must have been a poet.

The latter and more ambitious efforts of Lisle Bowles—for he wrote at least four long poems—could not be said to have been thoroughly, that is, eminently successful. In all, passages of tender sentiment and fine description abound; but, on the whole, they were more the pumpings up, than the pourings out, of genius. His mind possessed more elegance than vigour; was rather reflective than imaginative. He is deficient in variety; and he ventured not, like Crabbe, to paint things exactly as he saw them; hence there is a sameness about his outlines that savours of mannerism. His familiar walk was amid the gentler affections of our nature; but his tenderness seldom rises into passion; or it is merely the anger of the dove,

“Pecking the hand that hovers o'er its mate.”

The Attic taste of his scholarship seemed to trammel that enthusiasm, essential for the creation of high lyric poetry; and in this he resembles Thomas Warton—to whom, in his descriptive sketches, as well as in his chivalresque tendencies, he bore a greater resemblance than to any other author.

The first of Bowles's larger poems, “The Spirit of Discovery by Sea”—which comprehends all navigators from Noah downwards—was a daring subject, but treated with distinguished ability; and, taken as whole, is perhaps the best. “The Missionary,” founded on a romantic incident in South American history, is principally valuable from its many admirable pictures of that varied and gorgeous region. “The Grave of the Last Saxon,” a historico-romantic poem, relating to the

times of William the Conqueror and the sons of Harold, is more ambitious in design, is pervaded throughout by a fine antique tone—for Bowles was somewhat of an antiquarian of the Sylvanus Urban school—and is full of chivalrous “renown and knightly worth.” His last laborious effort was “Banwell Hill, or Days Departed” —principally to be regarded as a loco-descriptive poem, redolent of fine English scenery, which a Gainsborough might have painted; and of rural manners, which in gentle beauty contrast brightly with the sterner and more rugged portraiture of Crabbe. The striking Cornish legend of “The Spectre and the Prayer-Book,” originally published under the fictitious name of Dr Macleod, was afterwards incorporated with the work of which it now forms the conclusion.

Sixty years ago — *Eheu fugaces, Posthume, labuntur anni!*—many of the shorter productions of Bowles were great favourites with the young and the sentimental, ere supplanted by the more spirit-stirring lays of Scott and Byron. His “Villager’s Verse-Book” had for its admirable object the connecting the most obvious images of country life with the earliest impressions of humanity and piety. Several of these little effusions are very beautiful, and are quite equal in poetical merit to the “Hymns for Childhood” by Mrs Hemans; although it must be confessed that neither Bowles nor Mrs Hemans quite understood the mode of writing merely for children. Both are continually shooting beyond the mark, and seem loath to sacrifice a good idea, simply because it is incompatible with the purpose in hand; and they are consequently, in that department, much inferior in success alike to Mrs Barbauld in her “Hymns in Prose,” and to Anne and Jane Taylor, in their appropriately titled “Hymns for Infant Minds.”

Bowles was deficient in the passion and imagination which command great things; but he was, notwithstanding, a true poet. He had a fine eye for the beautiful

and the true; and, although his enthusiasm was tempered, we never miss a cordial sympathy with whatever is pure, noble, and generous—for his heart was in the right place. Writers of ephemeral reputation fall with the circumstances to which they owed their rise; but no man who has been giving some measure of delight to thousands, through two or three generations—and Bowles has done so—can be altogether a deception. Casual topics may insure present success; but poetical fame is not, cannot be founded on these, however a few apparent exceptions may seem to favour such a supposition—as those of Butler, of Churchill, and of Anstey—for all these were true poets. Grand principles alone insure permanency. The human heart and its sympathies being the same from age to age, it requires only the “touch of nature to make all flesh kin;” but passing purposes are accomplished by passing means. Ere a century has elapsed, the gigantic reputation of Swift is dwarfed by that distance which extinguishes court ladies, ribanded senators, political clubs, and personal squabbles about coin and currency; and Dr Wolcot—the Peter Pindar whose dread satires are said to have caused his being pensioned off in the reign of George the Third—is now as utterly forgotten (although scarcely deservedly so, for he wrote a few good things in quite another and higher vein) as if he had flourished in the reign of Hardicanute.

The following lines from “The Grave of Howard” sufficiently indicate Bowles’s general manner:—

“When o’er the sounding Euxine’s stormy tides  
 In hostile pomp the Turk’s proud navy rides,  
 Bent, on the frontiers of the Imperial Czar,  
 To pour the tempest of vindictive war;  
 If onward to those shores they haply steer  
 Where, Howard, thy cold dust reposes near,  
 Whilst o’er the wave the silken pennants stream,  
 And seen far off the golden crescents gleam,

Amid the pomp of war, the swelling breast  
 Shall feel a still unwonted awe impress'd,  
 And the relenting Pagan turn aside  
 To think—on yonder shore the Christian died !

But thou, O Briton ! doomed, perhaps, to roam  
 An exile many a year, and far from home,  
 If ever fortune thy lone footsteps leads  
 To the wild Dnieper's banks and whispering reeds,  
 O'er Howard's grave thou shalt impassion'd bend,  
 As if to hold sad converse with a friend.  
 Whate'er thy fate upon this various scene,  
 Where'er thy weary pilgrimage has been,  
 There shalt thou pause, and shutting from thy heart  
 Some vain regrets that oft unbidden start,  
 Think upon him, to every lot resign'd,  
 Who wept, who toil'd, who perish'd for mankind."

In the famous Bowles, Campbell, and Byron controversy, regarding the invariable principles of poetry, I have always felt convinced that Bowles had distinctly the better of his two more celebrated antagonists, both of whom were not only indifferent logicians, but were ever arguing directly in the teeth of their own practice ; for what are "The Pleasures of Hope," "Gertrude of Wyoming," "O'Connor's Child,"—what the "Childe Harold," "The Corsair," "Manfred,"—but splendid illustrative examples of the tenets which Bowles upheld ? He maintained that images drawn from the sublime and beautiful in nature are more poetical than any drawn from art ; and that the passions and aspirations of man's heart belong to a higher class of associations than those derived from incidental and transient manners or modes of life ;—in short, that Pope's "Epistle of Eloïse" was intrinsically loftier poetry than "The Rape of the Lock," Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon" than his "English Bards," and Campbell's "Mariners of England" than his "Mobbiad." The battle against Bowles was maintained by his opponents shirking their main position, and attacking him on the lower ground of his



not having allotted due importance to poetic art,—that command which the poet ought to have over his materials. This may or may not have been the case: at all events, it is only one of the subsidiary issues of the argument; and it was simply by ingeniously evading the main topic of controversy, that Byron, Campbell, Roscoe, Gilchrist, and the host of pamphleteers whom they succeeded in calling into the field—by keeping up a sort of bush-fighting—brought matters at last to an ignoble truce. That Bowles was once or twice entrapped into unwary admissions, I admit; but, on the whole, he showed himself a much more expert master of fence—a far abler, subtler, and more logical disputant than any of those who attempted to answer his arguments.

## LECTURE II.

The origin, progress, and tenets of the Lake School.—S. T. Coleridge, Robert Southey, Lloyd and Lovell.—The *Lyrical Ballads*.—William Wordsworth as a reformer of our poetry; his peculiar views; his faults and excellencies; extract from *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*; *Morning Sketch*; from *Peter Bell*; *Sonnet at Killiecrankie*; and portion of *Skating Scene* from *Prelude*.—Coleridge as a man of genius; his early magnificent promise.—The *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*: specimen, *Youth and Age*.—Charles Lamb; extract from *Forest Scenery*.—Thalaba, Madoc, Kehama, Roderick, and the *Miscellaneous Poetry* of Southey: specimens, *Boyhood of Thalaba*; *Storm at Sea*, from *Madoc*; *Love*, from *Kehama*.—*Autumn Sketch*.—Southey's amazing industry; his excellencies and defects.—Walter Savage Landor; general character of his poetry.—The Scottish poets of the period, more especially James Hogg and Allan Cunningham.—Extracts from *Witch of Fife* and *Kilmeny: Fragment*.—Do Science and Poetry progress together?

WE come now to make mention of one of the most brilliant constellations of genius that ever illustrated our literature, whether we regard originality or variety. It consisted primarily of three great luminaries—Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth; and of three lesser ones—Lamb, Lloyd, and Lovell.

In 1794, Samuel Taylor Coleridge made his appearance as an author in his “*Juvenile Poems*,” and in a drama on “*The Fate of Robespierre*,” followed by a collection of verses, in conjunction with Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb, wherein many indications of the future excellencies of the author of “*Christabel*” may be discovered. During the same year came forth another partnership volume, by Robert Southey and Robert Lovell,—shortly after which the latter died. Coleridge and Lamb had been schoolfellows at Christ

Church Hospital; where, even then, the former was a kind of prodigy—wonderful for his natural abilities, eccentric in his habits, simple to silliness. All these youths were enthusiastic—were united by reciprocity of taste, feeling, and sentiment—were optimists according to the sanguine fashion of the day; and, while they deplored the evils of society, hopefully thought to put some new reforming spokes into the machinery, which were to make all things go smack and smooth. In short, without the smallest possible superfluity in friends, funds, or experience, they reckoned the regeneration of the world a task of the easiest, and solaced each other with seeing golden visions, and dreaming Elysian dreams. Many little harassing difficulties—many tiny nibblings at the shoe-latchets of the mighty—taught them, nevertheless, that they were still denizens of this prosaic lower world, and that it was somewhat necessary for them, whatever the Utopian fashion of their opinions might be, to conform to the usages of that society which they exhibited such a philanthropic anxiety to reclaim. Circumstances, like the Lilliputian pegs of Gulliver, began to pin them down to stern realities, more closely and securely than they had at all anticipated; and, like a beautiful moral exhalation, the little Pantisocratical Society was soon fain to break up. Coleridge, who cultivated the deserts of Sahara, and continued dreaming to the end of life's chapter, went to reside at Nether Stowey, in Somersetshire; at Alfoxden, two miles distant from which William Wordsworth had already located himself. He also had, previous to this, appeared as a poet in his "Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches;" and kindred feelings and pursuits brought and bound the gifted youths together. They seemed to have each the most intense admiration for the other's abilities. Both were philosophers as well as poets: most of their leading ideas on literary points coincided; and, as the first experimental fruits

of a new system, which was to renovate and refresh literature—a system which was to bring back poetry, both subjectively and objectively, to everyday life, and which was to make its style and language those of common intercourse—the “Lyrical Ballads” made their appearance. The greater part of the volume was Wordsworth’s; but, with two or three other things less important, Coleridge contributed certainly the most striking poem in the collection—“The Ancient Mariner.”

The transition from fripperied Art to half-slipshod-drabbish Nature, and at one leap, was too much for the multitude; so the primary results were anything but auspicious. Some laughed; many marvelled; most regarded the matter as a strange attempt at hoaxing the gullible. For several years little real notice was attracted by the ballads; and the attendant sounds were less the whoop of triumph than the scoff of scorn. Nor, all things considered, was this much to be wondered at. Subjects which had been long scouted as utterly unfit for verse, were pitched upon as those really most worthy of poetical embellishment; and from complicated theories and trite artificial diction, the young writers had flown away to the most bald topics and to the most colloquial platitudes. The pathetic was not only brought into contact with the ludicrous, but worked up with it into a compound of that doubtful species of nutriment which was neither fowl nor flesh; and the reader felt often at a loss to know, whether he was called upon to lament with “Betty Foy,” or to rejoice with her idiot son “Johnny.” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” with all its picturesqueness—for it is like a scene by Berghem—was equally a puzzler. “The Last of the Flock” verged on the silly; while “Alice Fell,” with her tattered red cloak, was palpably mediocre and worthless. Widely different, however, were the ballad of “Ruth,” “Lucy

Gray," "We are Seven," "Expostulation and Reply," "The Pet Lamb," "Michael," and "The Brothers"—compositions which, in their several ways, were never excelled in Wordsworth's after compositions. In these there was much gold, if not refined gold. There was a comprehensive spirit of humanity, a truthful delineation, a natural grandeur, a simplicity of feeling, which proved the true poet; and subtler critics felt and acknowledged that the destiny of the author, for success or failure, lay entirely in the kind of web that he might subsequently choose to weave.

I shall give first a short specimen of Wordsworth's original eccentricities. An old woman, stealing sticks, is seized and shaken by the farmer; but she chanced to be a friend of Monk Lewis', consequently with a spice of necromancy about her; so straightway showed him he had caught a tartar:—

"She prayed, her withered hand uprearing,  
While Harry held her by the arm—  
'God! who art never out of hearing,  
O may he never more be warm!  
The cold cold moon above her head,  
Thus on her knees did Goody pray:  
Young Harry heard what she had said,  
And icy cold he turned away.

"He went complaining all the morrow  
That he was cold and very chill;  
His face was gloom, his heart was sorrow,  
Alas! that day for Harry Gill!  
That day he wore a riding-coat,  
But not a whit the warmer he;  
Another was on Thursday brought,  
And ere the Sabbath he had three.

"'Twas all in vain, a useless matter,  
And blankets were about him pinn'd;  
Yet still his jaws and teeth they chatter,  
Like a loose casement in the wind.

And Harry's flesh it fell away,  
 And all who see him say, 'tis plain,  
 That, live as long as live he may,  
 He never will be warm again.

"No word to any man he utters,  
 A-bed or up, to young or old,  
 But ever to himself he mutters,  
 'Poor Harry Gill is very cold !'  
 A-bed or up, by night or day,  
 His teeth they chatter, chatter still.  
 Now think, ye farmers all, I pray,  
 Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill."

The general voice of the public, as well as the leading organs of criticism, were decidedly, throughout several years, against the "Lyrical Ballads," which were regarded as literary eccentricities; and so, in many points of view, they were; but their excellencies, which were not so obvious, and which were *caviare* to the many, attracted by degrees a small knot of enthusiastic and enlightened admirers, among whom it is pleasant to know were John Wilson and Thomas De Quincey, both, at that time, young men pursuing their Oxford studies. Unknown to each other, they had written to Wordsworth, expressive of their admiration; and his letters in reply were long cherished by either with affectionate regard. Curious it is that both should have remained to the present day among the first-class expositors of Wordsworth's excellencies.

Coleridge's contributions to the "Lyrical Ballads" were at length withdrawn; and, from time to time, poem after poem was added to the collection by Wordsworth, all more or less remarkable for the peculiar merits or defects which characterised their predecessors; until, in 1807, two other volumes of entirely new matter made their appearance, worked out on the same pattern, and equally defiant of existing pre-

judices, and cotemporary criticism. It was now clear that all advice had been quite thrown away, and that the author's system, and no other, whether right or wrong, was the one which was to be adhered to by him. There were here, as in the former collection, not only in the opinion of Mr Jeffrey, but by the confession of even Mr Southey himself, an extraordinary melange of the good, the bad, and the indifferent. We had the "Sister Emmelines," and "The Lesser Celandines," and "The Dancing Daffodils;" the "Simon Lees," and "The Idle Shepherd Boys," all equally dubious in literary character, as the "Goodys" and "Harrys" and "Alices" of earlier times; but then their almost deadweight was buoyed up by "The Hart Leap Well," "Resolution and Independence," "The Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," and by that "gem of purest ray serene," the lines on "Revisiting Tintern Abbey,"—which is by far the best epitome of Wordsworth's poetical philosophy, and the most characteristic specimen of its excellencies, peculiarities, and defects.

Having from the first volume of the "Ballads" picked out a glaring specimen of Wordsworth's peculiarities, it is but just to give from the second batch a short one of his peculiar beauties. It is a morning sketch:—

"There was a roaring in the wind all night;  
 The rain came heavily and fell in floods;  
 But now the sun is rising calm and bright;  
 The birds are singing in the distant woods;  
 Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods;  
 The jay makes answer as the magpie chatters;  
 And all the air is filled with the pleasant noise of waters.

"All things that love the sun are out of doors;  
 The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;  
 The grass is bright with rain-drops; on the moors  
 The hare is running races in her mirth;

And with her feet she from the plashy earth  
Raises a mist, which, glittering in the sun,  
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

“ I was a traveller then upon the moor ;  
I saw the hare that raced about with joy ;  
I heard the woods and distant waters roar,  
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy :  
The pleasant season did my heart employ :  
My old remembrances went from me wholly,  
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.”

Here we have not a syllable of redundancy. The scene is perfect in its picturesqueness and truth: we have combined in it the calm clearness of Calcott with the graphic vitality of Edwin Landseer.

Early in youth Wordsworth had felt the poetical impulse; and never, perhaps, in the whole range of literary history, from Homer downwards, did any individual, throughout the course of a long life, dedicate himself to poetry with a devotion so pure, so perfect, and so uninterrupted as he did. It was not his amusement, his recreation, his mere pleasure—it was the main, the serious, the solemn business of his being. Everything was made subservient to it—his observation, his reading, his personal experiences. It was his morning, noon, and evening thought; the object of his out-of-door rambles; the subject of his in-door reflections; and, as an art, he studied it as severely as ever Canova did sculpture, or Michael Angelo painting.

The grand aim of Wordsworth's life seemed centred in the composition of a philosophical poem, which was to contain “Views of Man, Nature, and Society;” and, in intellectual preparation for this mighty task, he wrote a preliminary work, which might almost be considered autobiographical, as it contained a record of the origin, cultivation, and progress of his own powers. This was “The Prelude,” which



was reserved for posthumous publication, although several of its better bits had, from time to time, found a place in the collected editions of his works. The greater poem, to be entitled "The Recluse," as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement, was to consist of three parts, of which "The Excursion"—the only one which ever saw the light—was the second. This ("The Excursion") was intended to be more dramatic than the first and third divisions, which were to be chiefly meditative. When completed, Wordsworth intended that the two works—"The Prelude" and "The Recluse"—should have that kind of relation to each other that the antechapel has to the body of a Gothic church. His love of system, fantastic as this may seem, did not stop even there; for he arranged his minor poems so, that they might have the same connection with this Gothic church as the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses ordinarily included in such edifices. For many of them this must have been a Procrustes bed; and a fitting subdivision for "Peter Bell" and "The Waggoner" must have proved not a little puzzling, unless he thrust them at once into the penance-hole!

The resolute determination and the self-devotion of Wordsworth were morally grand in themselves, and led to grand results—the complete restoration of our poetical literature to truth and nature; yet his dogged self-will not only kept him from removing from his writings, but literally blinded him to those blots and blemishes in them, which the most devoted of his admirers could not only not help perceiving, but deplored. Coleridge was framed of different materials: if the one was iron, the other was wax, and took each plastic bend of the moment. Nothing, indeed, could be more uncertain or mercurial, for his very life seemed spasmodic; but he had gigantic powers; so, when he roused him to the combat, in one day he did a giant's

work—and for what? that, for the next month, he might have “a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.” Grand schemes were continually haunting his imagination; but everything ended in fragment, or in mere intention; and it is much to be doubted if Coleridge would not have occupied quite as high a place as he now does in literature—and that is deservedly a high one—had he, ere even this century commenced, broken his wand, like Prospero. His inspiration—for, if ever a man seemed inspired, it was Coleridge—was at its fullest and highest from 1795 to 1797; that was, during the whole time of his residence at Nether Stowey. It was there and then that he composed his “Christabel,” his “Ancient Mariner,” his “Genevieve,” his “Kubla Khan,” his “Tears in Solitude,” his “Religious Musings,” his “Nightingales,” his “Ode to the Departing Year,” and his tragedy of “Remorse”—in truth, nine-tenths of all the things by which his name has been immortalised; although, in mere bulk, these form but an inconsiderable item in relation to what he afterwards wrote, talked, dogmatised, and published. His system of poetical faith was, as I have said, akin to that of Wordsworth, of whose poems he gives a characteristic analysis in his “Biographia Literaria.” His claims for his friend are these,—

“*First*, An austere purity of language, both grammatically and logically; in short, a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning. *Secondly*, A corresponding weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments, won not from books but from the poet’s own meditations. They are *fresh*, and have the dew upon them. Even throughout his smaller poems, there is not one which is not rendered valuable by some just and original reflection. *Thirdly*, The sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs, the frequent *curiosa felicitas* of its diction. *Fourthly*, The perfect truth of nature in

his images and descriptions, as taken immediately from nature, and proving a long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives a physiognomic expression to all the works of nature. *Fifthly*, A meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought, with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man; the sympathy, indeed, of a contemplator from whose view no difference of rank conceals the sameness of the nature; no injuries of wind, or weather, or soil, or even of ignorance, wholly disguise the human face divine. *Last*, and pre-eminently, I challenge for this poet the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word. In the play of fancy, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is always graceful, and sometimes recondite. The likeness is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of predetermined research, rather than spontaneous presentation. Indeed, his fancy seldom displays itself as mere and unmodified fancy. But in imaginative power he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakspeare and Milton; and yet in a mind perfectly unborrowed and his own. To employ his own words, which are at once an instance and an illustration, he does, indeed, to all thoughts and to all objects,

‘add the gleam,  
The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet’s dream.’”

With much, nay, with almost all of this, I am quite disposed to agree; but then it applies only to Wordsworth’s better manner, and to his most successful compositions. His peculiar faults, which are left untouched by Coleridge, are quite as obvious as his peculiar beauties. Alike in his later as in his earlier poems, Wordsworth is not seldom verbose and exaggerated, to a degree that verges on bombast and Ancient Pistol; occasionally simple to a silliness that reminds of Shallow

and Slender. Add to this a perverse singularity in his views, alike in depicting scenery and action—views that are not such as necessarily or naturally obtrude themselves, and have the same analogy to those generally adopted, as Goodwin Sands to Tenterden steeple. These—the obvious—are left out, to give place to some singular or eccentric phrase, which rarely exhibits itself. As in Turner's later pictures—and at times, certainly, with something of the same magical effect—we have often colouring almost without outline; also speculation, without any distinct or definite basis—profound philosophical deductions from utter inanities. In short, Wordsworth's conclusions are to his reasons frequently much in the ratio of Sir John Falstaff's bread to his sack; and character, instead of being delineated by action, is generally merely indicated by abstract idiosyncrasy, or some peculiar personal eccentricity—as in the "Boy of Windermere," who whooped to the owls, or in "Andrew Jones," with his drum. Hence, also, it is that the great bulk of Wordsworth's writings is sadly deficient—when we measure him by the standards of Shakspeare, and Burns, and Byron, and Scott—of human interest; and that he is relished by the moiety, solely from the excellencies of select pieces or passages—with some it may be ten, and with others twenty or thirty, which, in spite of themselves, cling to their memories as the mussel does to the rock, or the old man of the sea to the back of Sinbad the Sailor. With an ear for blank verse finer, perhaps, than any since the days of Milton, or perhaps of Akenside, who was another great master, he yet passes off whole pages of measured prose as such, "flat, stale, unprofitable," utterly valueless in matter and manner, and unredeemed by merit of any kind—a mystery perfectly inscrutable, when we find these in juxtaposition with others which even the author of "Paradise Lost" might have been pardoned for coveting. To these aberrations of fancy

and intellect Wordsworth seems to have been himself wholly blind; for they are equally obtrusive in "The Prelude," which lay in MS. beside him for half a century, read and re-read, and over and over again revised and altered—as in "The Excursion" itself; and the same may be said of passages "in number numberless" throughout his minor poems, even when he was subjected to the fetters of rhyme.

Wordsworth planned on a magnificent scale. He would not have a Grecian temple like the Parthenon, or even a St Peter's, like that of Rome—his ideas expanded to a Pyramid of Cheops, a Stonehenge, or a Cave of Elephanta. "The wonderful, the wild" he despised; he clung alone to the vast. His foundations were gigantic in extent; and, by a mere man's labour, a corresponding superstructure could only be partially reared. He wrote by at least a half too much; and yet his poetical edifice must remain for ever a fragment. Of Cowper's "Task," or of Thomson's "Seasons," no reader would willingly part with a single entire paragraph; it would be like taking a stone out of a completed building. Not so with "The Excursion," or "The Prelude;" for large portions of either might be expunged with advantage, as mere abnormal excrescences on these otherwise grand productions. No really great poet resembles Wordsworth in tedious prolixity, save Spenser. In their happier moods, they each flash upon us with the crimson light of setting suns, or with "the innocent brightness of the new-born day;" but withal—and with reverence for their manifold excellencies be it spoken—they are not unfrequently garrulous, spin long yarns, and consequently must submit to be often read only in extract by the less enthusiastic.

Yet with all his exaggeration of tone, cumbrous machinery, over-minuteness of detail, occasional trite baldness, and disregard of proportion in the relations of objects—his perverse blending of the little with the

great, and his not seldom mistaking the simply silly for the severely simple—Wordsworth is “a prevailing poet,” and must ever be regarded as a great one, for his high and manifold merits. Next to Scott, who stands alone and above all, and equal at least to Byron, Wilson, and Coleridge, he was the most original-minded man of his age. He had no prototype, unless he seems to have been foreshadowed by Milton; but rich as each might be in elementary principles and requisites, the materials from which they chose to work were quite different. The mind of him who likened himself in his darkness to

“blind Thamyris, and blind Meonides,  
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old”—

was a treasury overflowing with the gems and gold of the past, riches garnered from east and west, and from either pole; from the lands and languages of the Hebrew, the Assyrian, the Greek, the Roman, and the Italian; from the regions sparkling with barbaric pearl and gold, to where

“Chineses drive their cany waggons light;”

from Tartarian wilds, where the fabled Arimaspan keeps watch over buried treasures, to Norwegian hills, where bourgeon the giant pines,

“Fit for the mast of some great Ammiral.”

Not so with Wordsworth; he was scholastic only in his style; and to many he may well seem to have founded poetry itself, and to have no predecessor, so faint and few are his allusions to those who have flourished and gone before him. His similes seldom refer to the beings or things of the chronicled past; he draws them from nature, animate or inanimate, and they are generally the results of personal observation;

“From the bare trees, the mountains bare,  
And grass in the green field.”

A horse, outworn by the chase, is said to be "weak as a lamb the moment it is yeaned;" and an old man, bent over his staff, is likened to "a stone couched on the top of some bald eminence." The region amid which the summer, the autumn, and the winter of Wordsworth's life was passed, seemed to have impressed his mind with an almost superstitious dread of the collective power of matter; it weighed upon him, "an importunate and heavy load;" and he looked with a reverential fear on the forms of nature—the rugged precipice, the gloomy cavern, the green pastoral hill, the riply lake, the still, dark tarn, nay, even on the moss-covered boulder-stones, which are older in their associations than the dawn of art, and which, mayhap, have lain on the same spot, untouched and unremarked, since the commencement of time. "The moving accident was not his trade," as he himself tells us; it was

"To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts."

Everything was seen through the medium of an imagination, which, retaining the outline, imparted its own peculiar colouring to the filling up; and in reference to this point, Mr Hazlitt has strikingly remarked, that "his poems bear a distant resemblance to some of Rembrandt's landscapes, who, more than any other painter, created the medium through which he saw nature—and out of the stump of an old tree, a break in the sky, and a bit of water, could produce an effect almost miraculous."

If such Wordsworth's landscapes, so his characters. Whatever relation they may bear to his communings with other minds, they are ever, in part at least, drawn from himself. He groups these from their first elements; and, in giving the product, shows the growth of the virtues and the vices from their original seeds. Popular adventures, picturesque situations, and startling catastrophes, he holds far from him—sympathising alone

with feeling in its simplest forms, as it bubbles out from the great fountain-head of humanity. Hence it is that he seems as much pleased with the small as with the great; with the daisy as with the star; with the sleeping tarn as with the heaving ocean; with "the fairy flower as with the giant tree;" and hence it is, also, that his drawings have a Chinese character about them—the remote and the near being equally brought forward, in defiance of perspective—as to the man lying horizontally on the grass each blade seems a spear, and the circling wild-bee is confounded with the swallow in the remoter sky. Wordsworth attempted tragedy, but it was only in his youth, ere he had rightly measured his powers; and, notwithstanding the recommendations of Coleridge, Lamb, and other friends, whose early recollections of the MS. "Borderers" seem to have blinded their critical sagacity, he ought not to have published it. It contains a few fine imaginative touches and passages, but is utterly destitute of dramatic interest, and melts from the memory like a snow-wreath from the vernal hill-side. Dramatically regarded, the same may be said of the colloquies between the Recluse, the Pastor, and the Pedlar in "The Excursion." Each talks according to a given cue; but William Wordsworth is the mouth-piece through which they all speak. His genius was essentially didactic, and, although he might vary his mode, he found it impossible to go out of himself. His whole works are the history of his own individual mind; his poems are made up of analyses of his own thoughts, and a pervading love of nature. In him we have more of the internal power of poetry, with less of the external show, than in any other writer, save perhaps Dante. He does not deal in picturesque panorama, like Scott; nor in the dark and daring of sentiment, like Byron; nor in minutely circumstantial etching, like Crabbe; nor in gorgeous emblazonry, like Moore. He never groups for effect: his subjects are the simple,



the single, and often the apparently barren—till they are clothed with the drapery of his reflective imagination. All things are thus as potter's clay in his hands: he despotically exalts the humble, and gives an importance to the insignificant, till the tattered wandering beggar beams forth in his immortal attributes a lord of creation—till the cuckoo is no longer bird, but “a wandering voice”—till the inky tarn imbibes and is coloured by the hues of heaven—and till from the meanest flower that blows are extracted “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

The first great and most characteristic section of Wordsworth's poems, those written in strict conformity with his original system, may be said to contain the philosophy of pastoral life—of man as an aboriginal creature, dissociated, in a large measure, from the great framework of society; and taken all in all, these are his best works, and have been alike the most abused and the most admired. Wayward alike in selection of subjects, and in mode of handling many of these, still these lyrics are remembered—whether for good or evil—the only sure test of power; and on them, along with select passages from his longer, more ambitious poems, his name will rest—and, I doubt not, most securely. His middle-life writings are more composite in character, and have either a dash of the romantic, as in “The White Doe of Rylstone;” or of the classical, as in “Laodamia” and “Dion.” His last compositions are less striking. They exhibit the same artistic skill, the same mastery of the “English undefiled,” the same majestic repose and high love of sentiment; but the sharp angles of originality have been worn off, or rubbed down; they are more diluted and dilated—are the milk without the cream; read harmoniously, but leave only a vague indefinite impression on the reader's mind. I allude more especially to the “Yarrow Revisited;” the “Ecclesiastical Sonnets;” the “Sonnets on the

Punishment of Death," and the miscellanies published along with them.

Whatever may be thought of "The Excursion" as a whole—and many regard it as heavy, "wallowing, unwieldy, enormous," and unfinished—it abounds with sentimental, reflective, imaginative, and descriptive passages of the very highest order of excellence. "The Prelude" stands much on the same level; but it is as spring to summer—as youth to manhood; and its faults—those of diffuseness, inequality, and incompleteness—are identical. I doubt much whether "The Prelude" has added at all to the already high reputation of Wordsworth. It is an autobiographical record of the remembered feelings and incidents of his infancy, boyhood, and adolescence; of his experiences at Cambridge, at London, and at Paris; and of his convictions regarding the causes and consequences of the first, and, *par excellence*, the French Revolution—whose ultimate failure he mourns with unfeigned and undisguised regret. "The Prelude" will be remembered, however, less from its philosophical disquisitions—which for the most part are, as I have said, vague and hazy—than from the beauty and exquisite diction of some of the descriptive passages. These are comparable to anything within the compass of English blank-verse composition; and are fresh interpretations of Nature, passing directly from the intellect and imagination of the poet into the reader's memory, where they remain imprinted and imperishable. I refer especially to the description of the Black Mount rising from the water, as seen by the solitary rower in his boat; and which, by the power of phantasy, seemed to stride through the twilight after him, "with mountainous overwhelming;"—to the poet's vision, by the cave on the sea-shore, of the Arab and his camel, and his book, and the ever-rising, ever-pursuing flood of waters;—to his allusion to the shepherd-life of antique classical times on the banks "of delicate Galesus," and

of “rich Clitumnus ;”—and, above all, to the immortal skating scene, long ago given to the world by Coleridge in his “Friend ;” and which, along with the “Lines on revisiting Tintern Abbey,” every true disciple of Wordsworth must have had long ago delightedly by heart.

The earlier books of “The Prelude” are closer and less diffuse in style than its latter ones ; and throughout the whole composition, we have occasional passages strongly imitative of well-known portions of Milton’s prose writings ; as also verbal music not seldom reminding us of favourite lines in preceding poets, which, from their beauty, must have continued haunting his memory. It has been asserted, that our greatest and best poets are remembered by ninety-nine out of every hundred, even of their admirers, only by extract. With Wordsworth this must ever be pre-eminently the case. Thinking of “The Excursion,” we revert to the tale of Margaret, with its heart-crushing sorrow—to the magnificent sunrise scene, viewed from the solitary hill-top—to the churchyard among the mountains, with its sublimely moral lesson :—

“So fades, so languishes, grows dim, and dies  
All that the world is proud of ;”

to the highly wrought account of the origin of the Greek mythology—to the description of the manufactory by midnight—

“—— A temple where is offered up  
To Gain, the master-idol of the realm,  
Perpetual sacrifice ;”

and to the vivid picture of the ram on the river’s brink, with “its wreathed horns superb.” “The White Doe of Rylstone” is imaged to us by the exquisite draught of the baronial hall by moonlight, with its clock pointing at nine,—the peacock roosted for the night in the broad ash-tree, and the waters dimpling into a thousand thousand little rings, caused “by the night-insects in their play.”

"The Lyrical Ballads" may be said to have been only prelusive strains, which were to usher in higher and more earnest performers—preliminary task-works for Wordsworth's maturing powers. But, as I have said, these will remain his true anchor to fame—his "*monumentum ære perennius*;" for nowhere else is his originality so distinctly felt, or his imaginative enthusiasm so peculiarly felicitous. His longer poems can never be popular in a wide sense, and the larger portion of them may sink or swim; but, while sun and moon endure, the poetical temperament must ever kindle to at least a century of his sonnets, which are finer than any in the language—not excepting Milton's, Shakspeare's, or Warton's; and to the music of "Ruth," of "Laodamia," of "Yarrow Unvisited," of "Resolution and Independence," of "The Song of Brougham Castle," of "Hart Leap Well," of "Lucy Gray," of "The Founding of Bolton Priory," of "Michael," of "Tintern Abbey," and of the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality." With such things to keep him for ever in hallowed remembrance, William Wordsworth requires no laboured epitaph "over his honoured bones."

Among Wordsworth's most directly pathetic poems are "The Brothers," "Michael," "We are Seven," "Lament of Mary Queen of Scots," "Extempore effusion upon the death of James Hogg," "The Two April Mornings," "To the Daisy," (stanzas in memory of his brother John,) and portions of "Peter Bell." The following stanzas are from the last mentioned, and commemorate some of the "compunctious visitings" of that peripatetic reprobate:—

"But more than all, his heart is stung  
 To think of one, almost a child;  
 A sweet and playful Highland girl,  
 As light and beauteous as a squirrel,  
 As beauteous and as wild!

Her dwelling was a lonely house,  
 A cottage in a heathy dell ;  
 And she put on her gown of green,  
 And left her mother at sixteen,  
 And followed Peter Bell.

But many good and pious thoughts  
 Had she ; and, in the kirk to pray,  
 Two long Scotch miles, through rain or snow,  
 To kirk she had been used to go  
 Twice every Sabbath-day.

And when she followed Peter Bell,  
 It was to lead an honest life ;  
 For he, with tongue not used to falter,  
 Had pledged his troth before the altar  
 To love her as his wedded wife.

A mother's hope is hers ;—but soon  
 She drooped and pined like one forlorn ;  
 From Scripture she a name did borrow :  
 Benoni, or the child of sorrow,  
 She called her babe unborn.

For she had learned how Peter lived,  
 And took it in most grievous part ;  
 She to the very bone was worn,  
 And, ere that little child was born,  
 Died of a broken heart.

. . . . .

Close by a brake of flowering furze,  
 (Above it shivering aspens play,)  
 He sees an unsubstantial creature,  
 His very self in form and feature,  
 Not four yards from the broad highway.

And stretched beneath the furze he sees  
 The Highland girl—it is no other ;  
 And hears her crying, as she cried  
 The very moment that she died,  
 ' My mother !—oh, my mother ! ' "

Of the many exquisite sonnets of Wordsworth, none are more exquisite than those—"Upon the sight of a Beautiful Picture." "Written on Westminster Bridge," "To Sleep," "It was a beauteous Evening," "To Milton," "To Hofer," "Great men have been among us," and the following at "The Pass of Killiecrankie," which glows with the spirit of Tyrtæus:—

"Six thousand veterans, practised in war's game,  
Tried men, at Killiecrankie were arrayed  
Against an equal host that wore the plaid,  
Shepherds and herdsmen. Like a whirlwind came  
The Highlanders—the slaughter spread like flame;  
And Garry, thundering down his mountain-road,  
Was stopped, and could not breathe beneath the load  
Of the dead bodies. 'Twas a day of shame  
For them whom precept and the pedantry  
Of cold mechanic battle do enslave.  
Oh, for a single hour of that Dundee,  
Who, on that day, the word of onset gave!  
Like conquest would the men of England see,  
And her foes find a like inglorious grave."

I did not know that I can give a finer or fairer specimen of Wordsworth's blank verse than in some lines from the skating scene in "The Prelude." The passage seems to have been alike a favourite one with the author and with Coleridge. After referring to his communings with nature even from childhood, the poet thus proceeds:—

"Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me  
With stinted kindness. In November days,  
When vapours rolling down the valleys made  
A lonely scene more lonesome; among woods  
At noon; and, 'mid the calm of summer nights,  
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,  
Beneath the gloomy hills, homeward I went  
In solitude, such intercourse was mine:  
Mine was it in the fields both day and night,

And by the waters, all the summer long.  
 And in the frosty season, when the sun  
 Was set, and, visible for many a mile,  
 The cottage-windows through the twilight blazed,  
 I heeded not the summons : happy time  
 It was indeed for all of us ; for me  
 It was a time of rapture ! Clear and loud  
 The village-clock tolled six. I wheeled about  
 Proud and exulting, like an untired horse  
 That cares not for its home. All shod with steel,  
 We hissed along the polished ice, in games  
 Confederate, imitative of the chase  
 And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,  
 The pack loud-chiming, and the hunted hare.  
 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,  
 And not a voice was idle : with the din  
 Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ;  
 The leafless trees and every icy crag  
 Tinkled like iron ; while far distant hills  
 Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
 Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars  
 Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west  
 The orange sky of evening died away.

Not seldom from the uproar I retired  
 Into a silent bay, or sportively  
 Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,  
 To cut across the reflex of a star ;  
 Image that, flying still before me, gleamed  
 Upon the glassy plain ; and oftentimes,  
 When we had given our bodies to the wind,  
 And all the shadowy banks on either side  
 Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still  
 The rapid line of motion, then at once  
 Have I, reclining back upon my heels,  
 Stopped short ; yet still the solitary cliffs  
 Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled  
 With visible motion her diurnal round !  
 Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,  
 Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched  
 Till all was tranquil as a summer sea.”

Wordsworth's great merit lies in his having been a reformer, nay, in many respects a regenerator, of our national literature; and in proof of this we have only to turn back to that literature as he found and as he left it—in his having again directed our eyes to the majesty of nature—in his having disdainfully trampled on the trammels of conventional criticism, and led us back to "the pure well of English undefiled." Approximating to the Holy Scriptures themselves, his writings have a simplicity of thought, and a singleness of purpose, which we vainly look for elsewhere; and, after perusing a fashionable clever trumpery work of the day, redolent of the scented vices and quibbling artifices of society, we turn to the pictures and moralisings of Wordsworth, like the "captive long in city pent" to the green woods and the blue skies, to the waterfalls and to the mountains, to the scenes of primitive bliss and patriarchal simplicity.

I have thus given my impressions of the excellencies and the defects of Wordsworth's poetry—very imperfectly, I am quite aware—but, I trust, unpresumptuously. From 1798 until 1818, when Professor Wilson flashed on it the light of his critical genius, it might be said to have remained a book sealed—to whose cipher there was no key. To him, therefore, the world in a great measure owes the *sesame* to the occult treasure, and Wordsworth the happiness of knowing, in his declining years, that he had not over-estimated his powers—that his name was enrolled among the immortals. The subject has, since that time, been one most prolific of discussion in our cotemporary literary annals, and has been ably handled by Jeffrey, by Gifford, by Southey, by Lockhart, by Hazlitt, by Savage Landor, by Sterling, by De Quincey, and fifty other able pens; yet, I make bold to say, by no one with the same true knowledge of the subject—with the same critical depth and delicacy of tact—or with the same comprehensive grasp, as by Wordsworth's best friend—the illustrious President of



this Institution—who, when every hand was lifted against the Recluse of the Lake, stood forward dauntlessly, although alone, as his uncompromising champion, nor withdrew his foot from the barras line until he had heralded Wordsworth's fame "to every clime the sun's bright circle warms."

We must now return to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who, in almost every respect save genius, was the reverse of Wordsworth. The latter steadfastly pursued his purposes, and with a coolness of determination formed his plans and worked them out, scorning the obstacles before him; or dauntlessly grappling with them, persevering through good and bad report, until he overcame them. Neglect, ridicule, obloquy, disparagement, had no modifying, no controlling power over him. Strong in what he believed to be right, he either stood unmoved amid the hurtling storm, until its fury passed over him, or stoically trod on through the briers and thorns of disappointment. Not so his equal, and probably, at one time, superior in genius—Coleridge—who started in the race like a Flying Childers, and yet, infirm of purpose, drew up ere the race was half run. Take Coleridge at thirty, and no poet of any age or country had done what he had; while, at the same time, those who knew him best felt that these things were but as the "morning giving promise of a glorious day." All concur in declaring that his published writings at that period—original, and wild, and wonderful as they might seem—conveyed no adequate idea of his capabilities, of the perisopic knowledge and gigantic faculties of the man. By that time he had indited "The Friend"—eloquent, rambling, discursive, full of fragmental magnificence, of high-sounding promises, of transcendental metaphysics, and of "elaborate passages that led to nothing." From "The Monody on Chatterton," written at seventeen—and a portion of which I had the melancholy pleasure, when seated by his bedside

at Hampstead, of hearing him recite, in those tones delicate, yet deep, and "long drawn out," which can never be forgotten—from that elegy to his "Christabel" and "Ancient Mariner," his "Genevieve" and "Kubla Khan"—his career had been one of triumphant progression—the promise of what might have led to another Shakspeare or Milton; although a grown-up Coleridge must have been a *tertium quid*—a something, if equal to, yet very different from either. This was not to be. The seeming daybreak turned out to be but an *aurora borealis*. Titanic in its dimensions, his statue was to prove only a Torso.

We have here to regard Coleridge simply as a poet, not as the scholar, the philosopher, the politician, the translator, the essayist, or general prose writer. Leading off his verse stands "The Ancient Marinere"—probably the most characteristic manifestation of his powers—and one of the strongest and wildest sallies of pure imagination anywhere to be found, whether in reference to machinery or manner. It is a unique performance, reminding us of nothing else. We cannot idealise anything relating to earth so utterly unworldly as it is—so far removed beyond the boundary of common associations. "The Lenora," "The Wild Huntsman," and the tower scene in "The Robbers," are all inferior to it—are tame in comparison; as are the demonologies of Godwin, Maturin, Lewis, Byron, and Shelley. The supernaturalisms of all these seem only touched with magic; "The Ancient Marinere" is saturated with it. His figure is "long, and lank, and lean, as is the ribbed sea-sand; he is himself under a spell, and has strange power of speech; he wanders from land to land involuntarily; and in his glittering eye abides a snaky fascination, which compels even the abhorrent to stand still and listen. His tale is now of stormy seas,

"Where ice mast-high came floating by,  
As green as emerald;"

and anon of tropic regions, where,

“All in a hot and copper sky,  
The burning sun at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the moon ;”

turning the stagnant waters of ocean into snakes, “blue, glossy green, and velvet black,” which “coiled and swam in their tracks of golden fire ;” while the crew remained as

“ — in a painted ship,  
Upon a painted ocean.”

The movements of the verse are quite in accordance with the scenes and sounds described—“all carved out of the carver’s brain,” in a trance of imagination.

Next to this, “but oh, how different !” is the “Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie.” It breathes the very soul of harmony, and is bathed “in the purple light of love.” Nothing can be conceived more softly warm, more delicately, more deliciously beautiful. The time is when

“The moonshine stealing o’er the scene,  
Has blended with the tints of eve ;”

and with the two lovers before us, we are made to feel, not only that

“All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
Are but the ministers of Love,  
And feed his sacred flame ;”

but that it is even nursed by

“ — hopes, and fears, that kindle hope,  
An undistinguishable throng,  
And gentle wishes long subdued—  
Subdued, and cherished long.”

Not less necromantic were the warp and woof of that

loom in which Coleridge wove the web of "Christabel." In that tale, the spiritual and material are so exquisitely blended that it is difficult to know where they run into each other. The rhythm consists of a notation of accents, not of syllables—well according with the grotesque imagery, the wild situations, and the fragmental abruptness of the legend. "Christabel" is said to have been the key-note on which Sir Walter Scott pitched his "Lay of the Last Minstrel;" indeed, he himself tells us as much, and that its strange music was ever murmuring in his ears; and its publication, after having lain twenty summers in MS.—nearly thrice the Horatian term of probation—was pressed upon its author by Lord Byron, who, in his notes to "The Siege of Corinth," rapturously writes of it as "that singularly wild, and original, and beautiful poem." The framework is Gothic; and the incidents, both natural and supernatural, are in admirable keeping. The lady—"beautiful exceedingly"—has her mystic character brought out by touches the most delicately fine and discriminative,—her faltering at the crossing the hospitable threshold—her dread and inability of prayer—the moaning of the old watch-dog in his sleep—the flickering of the half-dead embers, as she crosses the hall—and the swooning under the lamp "fastened to an angel's feet." And, amid this twilight mysticism, we have occasional gushes of glowing human tenderness, such as the following:—

"Alas! they had been friends in youth;  
 But whispering tongues can poison truth;  
 And Constancy lives in realms above;  
 And life is thorny, and youth is vain;  
 And to be wroth with one we love,  
 Doth work like madness in the brain.  
 And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
 With Roland and Sir Leoline."

As a man of genius, Coleridge appeared to have eaten of

mandragora, or of "the insane root that takes the reason prisoner." His studies lay not in classical sunshine, but in the twilight of monastic speculation, and of Gothic romance. He voyaged not with Cook or Anson, but with Shelvocke and Davis—"ancient marineres;" his natural history was not that of Buffon and Cuvier, but of Pontopiddan and Saxo-Grammaticus; his alchemy not that of Black and Davy, but of Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus; his philosophy not that Reid or Paley, but of Thomas Aquinas and Jacob Behmen. He would not keep the high-road if he could find a bye-path; and he thrust aside the obvious and true, to clutch at the quaint and the curious. In short, in defiance of the jeweller's estimate, he would have preferred a moonstone, simply because it had fallen down from another sphere, to the richest diamond ever dug from the minds of Golconda.

It has been imputed to Coleridge, that, notwithstanding the multifarious riches of his own mind, he was fond of borrowing ideas from others. Nor was this without foundation; and it was wrong. But after all, and deducting every item that has been claimed for others, enough, and more than enough, remains to leave his high literary status beyond challenge. That he took—and, in that instance, why not?—the germinal idea of the "Ancient Mariner" from that passage of Shelvocke in "Purchas's Pilgrims," which narrates the circumstance of foul weather having followed the killing of an albatross, is likely, for we find the incident there; but, then, who could have made of it what he has done? The same may be said of his imputed plagiarisms from the philosophy of Schelling, from whom he took what certainly "not enriched him" or others; and of his obligations to the poetry of Count Stolberg, and Frederica Brun. That his sublime, his magnificent Miltonic "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," was engrafted on some verses by

the lady there can be little doubt, for no such parallels ever accidentally occurred. Yet, after all, he has taken no more than the starting-point; the whole of the glowing and glorious pouring forth of the heart and spirit, which follows, appertaining exclusively to the English poet. "The Remorse" and "Zapolya" do not fall to be considered here, (the last is scarcely worthy of his fame;) nor do his translations from Schiller, which are first-rate. Coleridge wanted the art of arranging and combining his materials, or could not screw up the courage necessary for such a task. The finest of his minor compositions are "Kubla Khan," "The Pains of Sleep," "Youth and Age," "The Chapel of William Tell," and "The Wanderings of Cain," an impassioned prose poem. Many think that Coleridge did not fulfil his destiny. In this I can scarcely agree. He might have done many more things, but scarcely any mightier; and, from what he has left, the most remote posterity will be entitled to say—"ex pede Herculem."

The following little poem combines in itself many of the distinctive characteristics of its author's genius, and seems to me to be nearly perfect in its touchingly simple and serene beauty:—

“Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,  
 Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee—  
 Both were mine! Life went a-Maying  
 With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,  
     When I was young!  
 When I was young? Ah woeful *when!*  
 Ah for the change 'twixt now and then!  
 This breathing house not built with hands,  
 This body that does me grievous wrong,  
 O'er airy cliffs and glittering sands.  
 How lightly then it flashed along!—  
 Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore  
 On winding lakes and rivers wide,  
 That ask no aid of sail or oar,  
 That fear no spite of wind or tide,

Naught cared this body for wind or weather  
When youth and I lived in't together.

Flowers are lovely; Love is flower-like;  
Friendship is a sheltering tree;  
O the joys that came down shower-like,  
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,

Ere I was old!

*Ere I was old? Ah woeful ere!*  
Which tells me Youth's no longer here!  
O Youth! for years so many and sweet,  
'Tis known that thou and I were one;  
I'll think it but a fond deceit—  
It cannot be that thou art gone;  
Thy vesper-bell hath not yet toll'd,  
And thou wert aye a masquer bold;  
What strange disguise hast now put on,  
To make believe that thou art gone?  
I see these locks in silvery slips,  
This drooping gait, this altered size;  
But spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,  
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes!  
Life is but thought; so think I will  
That Youth and I are housemates still."

Of Coleridge's original coadjutors, Lloyd and Lamb, only a few words require to be said. The former had considerable vigour and originality, but was involved and deficient in directness. In his "*Nugæ Canoræ*" there were many striking poems and passages; but the harshness and ruggedness of his versification for ever debarred him from being a popular favourite. He is best remembered by his faithful and spirited translation of "*The Tragedies of Alfieri*."

Charles Lamb was a true poet, but not a great one. His genius was peculiar and wayward; and his mind seemed so impregnated with the dramatists preceding or cotemporary with Shakspeare—Marlowe, Webster, Ford, Shirley, Marston, Massinger, and their compeers—that he could not help imitating their trains of thought.

Yet he struck out a few exquisite things—sparks from true genius, which can never be extinguished ; as “The Old Familiar Faces,” “To Hester,” “The Virgin of the Rocks,” and the descriptive forest-scene in “John Woodvil,” which, it is said, Godwin, having found somewhere extracted, was so enchanted with, that he hunted—of course vainly—through almost all the earlier poets in search of it.

“ To see the sun to bed, and to arise,  
Like some hot amorist, with glowing eyes,  
Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him,  
With all his fires and travelling glories round him.

• • • • •  
Sometimes out-stretched, in very idleness,  
Naught doing, saying little, thinking less,  
To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,  
Go eddying round ; and small birds how they fare  
When mother Autumn fills their beaks with corn,  
Filched from the careless Amalthea’s horn ;  
And how the wood-berries and worms provide  
Without their pains, when Earth hath naught beside,  
To answer their small wants.  
To view the graceful deer come tripping by,  
Then stop and gaze, then turn they know not why,  
Like bashful youngers in society.  
To mark the structure of a plant or tree,  
And all fair things of earth, how fair they be.”

As a dramatic writer, Lamb was sadly deficient in plot and constructiveness. But, as a critic, his merits were of a higher order, and he is entitled to stand nearly in the first rank. His reputation will, however, ultimately rest on the “Essays of Elia,” than which our literature rejoices in few things finer.

We come now to the last of this great brotherhood of poets, and one of the most distinguished names that general literature has to boast of—Robert Southey. Like his brother bards, he was, in adolescence, an opti-



mist—a dreamer, like them, of golden dreams; but, with him, these died away before the strengthening sun of his intellect, like the deceitful exhalations of the morning.

Coleridge was unfitted for the encounter of social life, alike by temperament and circumstances. Wordsworth repudiated it from choice, and from its incompatibility with the plan he had charted out for himself. Southey, on the contrary, would have been a remarkable man in whatever he turned his attention to, let it have been law, physic, or divinity, the accountant's desk or the merchant's wharf, the pen or the sword. His enterprise, like his industry, was boundless; his self-appreciation was justly high; his spirits were exuberantly elastic, his courage indomitable. To himself he was the hardest of taskmasters; and he was not contented, like Coleridge, with merely meditating great things, but uniformly carried them through, compelling himself to a more than Egyptian bondage—for it was from year to year, and every day, and all day long, and to the end of his life. Yet, with a noble feeling of independence and self-respect, he submitted to this cheerfully, thinking less about the completion of a quarto than most authors do of a pamphlet. Hour after hour had its allotted task, continuously, unendingly. History, antiquities, bibliography, translation, criticism, tale, poem, political economy, statistics, polemics, almost every department of knowledge received emblazon from his able, ready, versatile, and unwearied pen. His finest phase, however, was as a poet; and we have now to glance at his chief works—"Joan of Arc," "Thalaba," "Madoc," "Kehama," and "Roderick." Totally independent of these, his lesser poems alone would have afforded ample materials for a substantial and enduring reputation to any other less ambitious writer.

In the earlier productions of Southey, he showed himself a poet of vivid imagination, ardent feeling,

descriptive power, but uncertain taste ; and all this was proved as much in his choice of subjects as in his manner of treating them. There was evidently too much writing from the mere impulse of the moment, without regard to what preceded, or was likely to follow ; a mixture of baldness and mellowness ; in short, a want of unity in the masses which made up his groups and landscapes. We are often haunted with a feeling of mismanagement, of misdirection, or carelessness ; for he worked out whatever materials were before him, or most easily accessible. When his fancy was at fault he called in his reading, and thus made a compound of invention and remembrance ; and hence it is that his poetical enthusiasm occasionally savours less of inspiration than rhetoric. Both Dr Johnson and Helvetius believed that an able man could write well at any time, if he only set doggedly about it — and they might have added on any subject, for Southey would have afforded an excellent illustration. But there can be little doubt, I think, that even Southey would have achieved much higher things had he been less self-complacent, and written with more elaboration.

Southey shone in the paths of gentle meditation and philosophic reflection ; but his chief strength lay in description, where he had few equals. It was there that he revelled and rioted in the exuberant energy of his spirit—a devoted worshipper of nature. *Akenside* describes a landscape as it affects the fancy ; *Cowper* as it impresses the feelings ; Southey daguerreotypes the landscape itself. *Coleridge* descants on the waving of a leaf ; Southey on its colour and configuration. *Wordsworth* delights in out-flowing sentiment ; Southey in picturesque outline. His capacious mind may be likened to a variegated continent, one region of which is damp with fogs, rough with rocks, barren and unprofitable ; the other bright with glorious sunshine, valleys of rich luxuriance, and forests of perennial verdure.

Notwithstanding the wildness, the irregularity, the monstrosity of Southey's Arabian and Hindoo romances, they possess a fascination, a power, and a beauty, which could only have been imparted by the touch of genius. If, occasionally, we miss the polish of high art, we have always the freshness of nature and its variety. Thalaba is in himself an exquisite creation—beautiful in youth, ardent in affection, staunch in virtue, heroic in courage, combining feminine sensibility of heart with more than chivalrous daring. His biography is outlined to us from the days of his innocent childhood, when he took delight to

“Launch his aimless arrow high in air,  
Lost in the blue of heaven,”

until his heart, in adolescence, ripens with a full harvest of love for “Oneiza, his own Arabian maid.”

“She called him brother ! was it sister love  
Which made the silver rings  
Round her smooth ankles and her tawny arms  
Shine daily brightened ? For a brother's eye  
Were her long fingers tinged,  
As when she trimmed the lamp,  
And through the veins and delicate skin  
The light shone rosy ? That the darkened lids  
Gave yet a softer lustre to her eye ?  
That with such pride she tricked  
Her glossy tresses, and on holiday  
Wreathed the red-flower crown around  
Their waves of glossy jet ?  
How happily the years  
Of Thalaba went by !”

We behold him, in the generous fever of his spirit, leaving in faith all he loved, to accomplish a mysterious plan of retribution ; and we follow him in his wanderings, now by gorgeous groves, and now through the burning sands of the desert ; now we see him lying beside

his camel at the welcome fountain, under the long light hanging boughs of the acacia, sky and plain on all sides bounding the horizon ; and now, far off, the ruins of old Babylon loom duskily between him and the sunset.

“ A night of darkness and of storms !  
 Into the chambers of the tomb  
 Thalaba led the old man,  
     To roof him from the rain.  
 A night of storms ! the wind  
     Swept through the moonless sky,  
 And moaned among the pillared sepulchres ;  
     And, in the pauses of its sweep,  
     They heard the heavy rain  
 Beat on the monument above.  
 In silence, on Oneiza's grave,  
     The father and the husband sate.”

At one time we see him buoyant with hope in the ultimate success of his mission ; and now we follow him from the banquet-room, while he gazes on the stars, and feels himself “ a lonely being, far from all he loved.”

Thalaba is wild and wonderful ; Kehama fantastic and monstrous. Thalaba is more varied and imaginative ; Kehama is more gorgeously and grotesquely magnificent. Kailyal is a beautiful creation, and almost rivals Oneiza in interest. While Ladurlad is under a curse, which for ever banishes sleep from his eyelids, and water from his lips, a guardian spell protects Thalaba from the spirits of evil. But poetic justice ultimately saves both. Ladurlad is rescued from torment, and wafted up in *The Ship of Heaven*, to meet his family in *The Bower of Bliss*. Thalaba dies in the arms of victory ; and at the gates of Paradise, “ Oneiza receives his soul.”

Few things have been written by human pen more perfectly beautiful, than the meeting of Ladurlad with his wife and daughter in the mansions of the Blest, and which thus concludes :—

—“ He knew,  
 Though brightened with angelic grace,  
 His own Yedillian’s earthly face ;  
 He ran and held her to his breast.  
 Oh joy above all joys of heaven !  
 By death alone to others given,  
 That moment hath to him restored  
 The early lost, the long deplored.”

The apostrophe which follows, commencing,

“ They sin who tell us love can die,”

although it must be fresh in the memory of very many present, I cannot resist quoting :—

“ They sin who tell us love can die :  
 With life all other passions fly,  
     All others are but vanity.  
 In heaven Ambition cannot dwell,  
 Nor Avarice in the vaults of hell :  
 Earthly these passions of the earth,  
 They perish where they have their birth ;  
     But Love is indestructible.  
     Its holy flame for ever burneth ;  
 From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth ;  
     Too oft on earth a troubled guest,  
     At times deceived, at times opprest,  
     It here is tried and purified,  
 Then hath in Heaven its perfect rest :  
     It soweth here with toil and care,  
 But the harvest-time of Love is there.  
 O ! when a mother meets on high  
     The babe she lost in infancy,  
 Hath she not then, for pains and fears,  
 The day of woe, the watchful night,  
     For all her sorrow, all her tears,  
     An over-payment of delight ?”

Praise almost equally high may be given to many other descriptive portions of the poem, and to several of the dramatic — as the Midnight Procession, the

apparition of Arvalan's embodied spirit, the picture of the Watchman on the tower at twilight, and of the Enchantress—which, however, strikes me as being more in the style of German than of Oriental exaggeration.

Madoc, although too lengthy, and not very artistically put together, also abounds in admirable passages,—passages as fine, especially in descriptions of external nature, as any Southey has ever written. The incidental episodes, more especially that of Caradoc, and "Prince Hoel's Lay of Love"—the music of which seems to have rung in the ear of Tennyson throughout an exquisite song in his "Princess,"—are among the most interesting portions of the work. Madoc's voyage is the finest sea-piece in the English language; and although in it he subjects himself to be brought into comparison with the prince of Roman poets, in the sea-wanderings of Æneas to Latium, he can scarcely be said to be found wanting in the balance.

What a fine commentary on the hearty old song, "Ye gentlemen of England, who sit at home at ease," are the following impressive lines:—

"'Tis pleasant, by the cheerful hearth, to hear  
 Of tempests, and the dangers of the deep,  
 And pause at times, and feel that we are safe;  
 Then listen to the perilous tale again,  
 And, with an eager and suspended soul,  
 Woo Terror to delight us:—but to hear  
 The roaring of the raging elements—  
 To know all human skill, all human strength  
 Avail not—to look round, and only see  
 The mountain-wave, incumbent with its weight  
 Of bursting waters o'er the reeling bark—  
 O God! this is indeed a dreadful thing!  
 And he who hath endured the horror, once,  
 Of such an hour, doth never hear the storm  
 Howl round his home, but he remembers it,  
 And thinks upon the suffering mariner!"

But of all Southey's great poems, “Roderick” is assuredly the best, and must ever keep its place among the first-class productions of the age. It was the achievement of his matured genius ; and is, throughout, more consistent and sustained than “Thalaba,” “Madoc,” or “Kehama.” Hence it is, perhaps, that its beauties stand less prominently forward from the general text ; but they are more in number, and higher in excellence, than those of his other works. Roderick himself is admirably portrayed,—bowed down with the burden of personal guilt and grief, yet burning to avenge the insults and injuries heaped on his devoted country. He is like a fallen constellation, yet bright with the traces of original glory—like a castle in ruins, breathing in stern decay of foregone magnificence. The conflict between varying passions, anxiety to restore the liberties of his country, and the consciousness of self-abasement, produces a compound which is the moving power—the lever of his character ; and Southey has managed this with great dramatic skill. The meeting with Florinda, the recognition of Roderick by his dog Theron, the battle-scene in which he falls, and the concluding passage—referring to the mystery regarding his place of sepulture—are among the most striking incidents of this great work, and vindicate Southey's claim to be regarded as a master of the lyre. “Joan of Arc” was less a thing of performance than promise, and may be likened to a young field of rich wheat overrun with poppies. “The Pilgrimage to Waterloo” is but the poet's journal cleverly versified ; some of the stanzas are very beautiful. Of his ballads and minor poems, the finest are “Lord William”—finer stanzas he never wrote ; “Mary the Maid of the Inn”—vigorous, but occasionally in bad taste ; “Queen Orrica ;” “The Victory ;” “Youth and Age ;” “Elegy on a favourite Dog ;” and “The Holly Tree.”

Southey's mind was exuberantly fertile, like a tropic

soil, and brought forth at once a plentiful crop of wheat and tares—of flowers and weeds. He was too self-satisfied to be a judicious farmer—if we are to pursue the simile—and let them all grow unchecked together. His intellect was more remarkable for scope than vigour; and, in his delineations of character, we have less of intuition than strict observation; but his situations are not only varied, but often eminently original. In dramatic power he was far before Byron; and perhaps Southey was the only man of our age—although some believe that Campbell, in the hey-day of his genius, might have done so—who could have enriched our literature with a tragedy worthy of standing, at least, on the same shelf with Otway's "Venice Preserved," and Home's "Douglas;" for as to Shakspeare, I mention him not at all. He stands apart from and above compare; and we may as well expect a second deluge as a second "Macbeth," or "King Lear," or "Hamlet," or "Othello." Many of Southey's portraitures are beautiful in outline, but deficient in passion: they have almost the classic coldness of sculpture. Not so his landscapes, which are always true to nature, and glow with vitality, varying from the dewy dawns of Claude to the magnificent evening twilights of Salvator Rosa. Almost every page of Southey's writings holds out a subject for the painter. The following is an autumn sketch from "Madoc."

"There was not, on that day, a speck to stain  
The azure heaven; the blessed sun alone,  
In unapproachable divinity,  
Careered, rejoicing in the fields of light.  
How beautiful, beneath the bright blue sky  
The billows' heave! one glowing green expanse,  
Save where, along the line of bending shore,  
Such hue is thrown, as when the peacock's neck  
Assumes its proudest tint of amethyst,  
Embathed in emerald glory: all the flocks  
Of Ocean are abroad; like floating foam



The sea-gulls rise and fall upon the waves ;  
With long protruded neck, the cormorants  
Wing their far flight aloft, and round and round  
The plovers wheel, and give their note of joy.  
It was a day that sent into the heart  
A summer feeling ; even the insect swarms  
From the dark nooks and coverts issued forth,  
To sport through one day of existence more.  
The solitary primrose on the bank  
Seemed now as if it had no cause to mourn  
Its bleak autumnal birth ; the rocks and shores,  
The forests, and the everlasting hills,  
Smiled in the joyful sunshine : they partook  
The universal blessing."

A name mixed up with those of the poets of the Lake School, for much of good and evil, is that of Walter Savage Landor. I can only afford to glance at him here ; for although, as an author, he looms large in the distance, the grand basis of his reputation is not poetry. The style, tone, idiom, and manner of Landor are all quite un-English. He never acquired the Saxon geniality of his mother tongue ; and his "Gebir," "Count Julian," and many of his other poems, read exactly like translations, closely rendered. His long residence in a foreign country will not quite account for this ; for a large part of his verse was composed long ere he had left England for Italy.

With many high excellencies, Landor's poetry must ever remain "a sealed book" to the multitude ; for whoever prefers to the obviously sublime, beautiful, and true, the grotesque, the visionary, and the involved, must submit to be admired by the capricious select, who can alone relish such elements in composition. In the case of Savage Landor, this waywardness is the more to be regretted as in his genius there are elements, vigorous, fine, and fresh, which might have enabled his muse to soar with eagle pinion high over Parnassus. He seems, however, all along, to have systematically addressed himself

only to the ear of an audience "fit, though few," and even to ignore the competency of a popular tribunal. He moulds exclusively according to the antique, and often with classical severity; but although quite willing to admit his general power, I cannot help thinking that his independence of thought not unfrequently degenerates into a tone something like proud self-sufficiency. We have genius, learning, and knowledge, ever apparently in abundance, but ever of a very peculiar kind; and often, after all, from a sheer love of paradox, he follows, by a side-wind, the very authorities apparently held in contempt. His poetic diction is involved and difficult, obscure from never-ending attempts at compression, and only redeemed by a picturesque power, and a word-painting, in which he was subsequently followed by Hunt, Keats, and Tennyson. His imagery is cold and statuesque—"we start, for life is wanting there;" but the habit of composing his pieces first in Latin, and then translating them into his mother tongue—said to be his actual practice—may readily be set down as a main source of their obscurity and apparent affectation. He has nothing like geniality of feeling, or warmth of colouring, in his portraits or pictures. His wit is cumbrous: when he exhibits point, it is rather the poisoned sting than the exciting spur; and his glitter can only be compared to sunshine refracted from an icicle. These remarks apply solely to the verse of Landor. As the author of the "Imaginary Conversations," and "The Trial of Shakspeare," he is an Antæus on his proper soil.

It may be asked, what was the peculiar poetry of Scotland about during this period? Not much; yet a current in the river-bed of the once copious stream of the Gavin Douglasses, and Dunbars, and Lyndsays, and Ramsays, and Hamiltons, and Fergussons, and which had overflowed like an autumn *spate* in Burns, showed that the fountain had by no means ceased to flow. Hector Macneil had contributed to the literature of his

“auld respectit mither” “The Waes of War”—a simple strain, yet full of pathetic truth, and which found its way to the hearts of his countrymen. Alexander Wilson, the pedlar and ornithologist, was perhaps better as either than as poet; but he possessed energy and enterprise, and some of his effusions evince not a little of the shrewd pawkiness of the “west countrie.” The genius of Tannahill—for he was a genius of a higher cast, although he wanted the resolution and firmness which the explorer of the American woods rejoiced in—showed itself in some exquisite lyrics that seemed to set themselves to music—as “The Flower of Dumblane,” “The Braes of Balquhiddier,” and “Gloomy Winter”—none of which were unworthy of Burns himself. Richard Gall, who followed more directly in the wake of Fergusson, produced at least two good things—“The Farewell to Ayrshire,” and “My only Joe and Dearie.” John Mayne, in his “Logan Braes” and his “Siller Gun,” showed how deeply the associations of his native land had taken hold of his susceptible heart and glowing fancy. Sir Alexander Boswell—the son of Samuel Johnson’s “Bozzy”—had contributed his “Jenny dang the Weaver,” as also the same accommodating damsel’s “Bawbee;” and to separate happy effusions were attached the signatures of William Laidlaw, Thomas Cunningham, James Hislop, William Nicolson, and Joseph Train. Two names, however—those of James Hogg and Allan Cunningham—demand something more than mere passing notice, as men of high original genius:—

“ — Plain his garb,  
 Such as might suit a rustic sire prepared  
 For Sabbath duties; yet he is a man  
 Whom no one could have passed without remark,—  
 Active and nervous is his gait. His limbs  
 And his whole figure, breathe intelligence.”

Such is the portrait drawn by William Wordsworth of

his pedlar, the hero of "The Excursion;" and, with very small wresting, the outlines may be made to apply to James Hogg, the scarcely less wonderful Ettrick Shepherd.

There are some miscellaneous writers, as John Bunyan, Isaac Walton, Sir Philip Sidney, Benjamin Franklin, Rousseau, and Benvenuto Cellini—and some poets, as Tasso, Petrarcha, and Alfieri, as Burns, Byron, and Hogg, whose lives are interwoven with or constitute a running commentary on their works; so much so, that it is impossible to come to a perfect understanding of the one without reference to the other. This is a critical privilege, however, which ought to be ever sparingly used and delicately resorted to—indeed never, save when countenanced by the plea of necessity. But with Hogg as his own repeated autobiographer, and who seems to have courted rather than repelled the license, there can be no trespass.

The intellectual history of James Hogg is certainly one of the most curious that our age has presented; and when we consider what an unlettered peasant was able to achieve by the mere enthusiasm of his genius, we are entitled to marvel certainly—not that his writings should be full of blemishes, but that his mind ever had power to burst through the Cimmerian gloom in which his earlier years seemed so hopelessly enveloped.

The school education of the author of "The Queen's Wake" may be discussed in a few words, and in none more characteristic than those of the Shepherd himself. Be it remembered that he was then six years old. "The school-house," he says, "being almost at our door, I had attended it for a short time, and had the honour of standing at the head of a juvenile class, who read the Shorter Catechism and Proverbs of Solomon. . . . Next year my parents took me home during the winter quarter service (as a cow-herd,) and put me to school with a lad named Kerr, who was teaching the children

of a neighbouring farmer. Here I advanced so far as to get into the class who read the Bible. I had likewise, some time before my quarter was out, tried writing, and had horribly defiled several sheets of paper with copy lines, every letter of which was nearly an inch in length. Thus terminated my education. After this I was never another day at any school whatever. In all, I had spent about half-a-year at it. It is true, my former master denied me, and, when I was about twenty years of age, said, if he was called to make oath, he would swear I never was at his school. However, I know I was at it for two or three months; and I do not choose to be deprived of the honour of having attended the school of my native parish, nor yet that old John Beattie should lose the honour of such a scholar." This really reminds one of the story of the foundling hero of one of Goldsmith's inimitable Essays, who was disclaimed by parish after parish, until the poor fellow began to fear that they were to come to a determination that he had been born in no parish at all—in fact, that he was a Utopian impostor.

After a boyhood of poverty, half-starvation, and labour, the shepherd-poet in embryo found himself at length aged fourteen, and the possessor of five shillings—with which he bought a fiddle (! ! !) over the catgut of which he kept sawing Scottish tunes, for two or three hours every night, after retiring to his roost in the lofts of the cow-house, where the discord could molest nobody save himself—an antitype of Orpheus—and the rats. Hogg relates of himself, that the perusal of "Burnet's Theory of Comets" produced a wonderful effect on his boyish imagination; set him pondering all the day on the grand Millennium and the reign of saints, and dreaming all the night of "a new heavens and a new earth," "the stars in horror, and the world in flames." Before this, he had read "The Life of Wallace," and Ramsay's "Gentle Shepherd," spelling the longer words as he went

along, and wishing both productions in prose, as the rhymes made him often lose the sense. It was not until his eighteenth year that he tried to write verses, and he acknowledges that his first attempts were "bitter bad." His genius, however, was prolific; and these, consisting of epistles, eclogues, comedies, and pastorals, so rapidly accumulated on his hands, that on one of his visits to the Edinburgh sheep-market he rashly ventured a small volume, which of course soon died off into silent hopeless oblivion. Some years after this hapless adventure of the Poems, the Shepherd's talents having attracted the attention of Mr Scott, that great poet encouraged him to the publication of his "Mountain Bard." As might have been expected from an imaginative mind yet mystified by the twilight of his situation, many of its pieces were also very paltry—although several bore indications of that grandeur of fancy which afterwards formed Hogg's chief distinction; nor do we think that he ever produced many finer things than his "Sir David Græme," and the fragment of "Lord Derwent."

"An Essay on Sheep," which gained a premium from the Highland Society, having put some money into his pocket, he contrived to lose it in some ruinous agricultural speculations; and, after several years of floundering, he resolved on the desperate enterprise of settling in Edinburgh—and as what? A literary adventurer. A collection of songs, under the title of "The Forest Minstrel," a volume of miscellaneous merit, created some little talk, but brought no golden harvest. His enthusiasm, however, continued unabated; and he possessed in a large degree that dogged confidence in his own abilities which could alone have carried him through his difficulties. Cast upon the ocean of literature—like Wordsworth's Highland boy in his tub—without rudder or compass, he felt that something behoved to be done—and that immediately. So he determined on a weekly

periodical, hight "The Spy," which was to be devoted to the enlightenment of the public in the niceties of morals, and the elegancies of polite literature. A Hot-tentot coming out in full fig as dancing-master could not have been a greater anomaly. Indeed, the Shepherd's qualifications for this self-imposed task may be guessed at from what he himself tells us. "At this time I had never once been in any polished society—had read next to none—was now in my thirty-eighth year—and knew no more of human manners than a child." The Spy, as might have been predicted of him, was therefore a sad nondescript—as suspicious-looking a tatterdemalion as was ever rigged out from the Cow-gate—not without occasional bursts, however, of natural cleverness and talent. Many of his Sybilline Leaves were racy and interesting; but, taken all in all, the stew thus cooked, and offered for Saturday consumption to the polite of the Modern Athens, was of such a miscellaneous and Irish character that few normal human stomachs could digest it. So the Spy was shortly given over as hopeless by his friends, and, evanishing from behind the foot-lamps of the literary stage, was heard of no more.

Harassed, dismayed, disappointed, and poor, Hogg now determined to brace himself up for a last great effort, and redeem that good opinion which a few sanguine friends yet strongly entertained of him. Nor did he disappoint them, for he produced "The Queen's Wake,"—a poem of distinguished excellence; and which, bating a few verbal laxities, would do honour to any name in our literature however high. Full of poetry and power, and of varied excellence, it is, at the same time, wonderfully free from those blemishes of coarseness, and of indifferent taste, which had unfortunately—but not miraculously—disfigured Hogg's former writings. By a great, a noble, and determined effort, he seemed to have got rid of all his trammels, and his muse

soared away from the earthly "Slough of Despond," into the blue heaven of invention, to look down on "The Abbot Mackinnon" in his enchanted ship, and on "Bonny Kilmeny" wandering amid the fadeless flowers of Fairyland. "The Pilgrims of the Sun" and "Mador of the Moor" followed. Both are very unequal, although not without passages in his best manner; and the same may be said of his "Dramatic Tales,"—of his most ambitious effort, "Queen Hynde,"—and of his various volumes of "Songs." Not a few, however, of these last are admirable, and entitle him to a place among the bards of Scotland equal to Ramsay, and second only to Burns. Some of his Jacobite melodies, as "Cam ye by Athole," "The Lament of Flora Macdonald," and "Donald Magilavray," have attained a popularity which they will keep—because they deserve it; while there is about his "Bonny Lass of Deloraine," his "Bonny Mary," "I lookit east, I lookit west," "I hae Naebody now," and "When the Kye come hame,"—a pathos, and a pastoral delicacy and wildness, which would alone have stamped the Shepherd a poet of rare and peculiar powers.

The finest vein of Hogg's poetry was exclusively that which ran among things surpassing nature's law. He was then like a being inspired; whenever his feet touched mother earth, he became a mere ordinary mortal. Amid the skyey regions of imagination he rejoiced in the power and splendour of his genius—an eagle of Parnassus; but when thridding through the affections and feelings of humanity, he was apt to sink down to the level of the commonplace verse-monger—or, at most, was a Triton among the minnows. To be appreciated as he deserves, the Shepherd must be studied in "Kilmeny," in "Glen Aven," in "The Witch of Fife," in "Old David," in "The Abbot Mackinnon," in the aërial voyagings of "Mary Lee," in "Sir David Græme," and in his various legendary stores and stories.



“Kilmeny” has been the theme of universal admiration, and deservedly so, for it is what Wharton would have denominated “pure poetry.” It is, for the most part, the glorious emanation of a sublime fancy—the spontaneous sprouting forth of amaranthine flowers of sentiment—the bubbling out and welling over of inspiration’s fountain. There is no perceptible art, no attempt at effect, no labour. The magician waves his wand, and we find ourselves walking in an enchanted circle—“In a cloudless eve, in a sinless world.” There is a vague wildness and an unearthly hue in its landscapes—a supernatural tint in its imagery—the tones of something not appertaining to this world in its irregular Æolian music. Nor, as a piece of imaginative writing, is the “Abbot Mackinnon” much inferior. “The Mermaid’s Song” is strangely grand; and its sketches of sea-scenery are full of a rude, remote, bleak magnificence.

The following verses from the strange, wild, picturesque ballad, “The Witch of Fife,” strongly indicate Hogg’s peculiar strain of thought and imagery. I have somewhat modernised the spelling of a few antique words:—

“The second night, when the new moon set,  
O’er the roaring sea we flew;  
The cockle-shell our trusty bark,  
Our sails the green-sea rue.

And the bauld winds blew, and the fire-flaughts flew,  
And the sea ran to the sky;  
And the thunder it growled, and the sea-dogs howled,  
As we gaed scouring bye.

And aye we mounted the sea-green hills,  
While we brush’d through the clouds of the heaven,  
Than soused down right, like the star-shot light,  
From the lift’s blue casement driven.

But our tackle stood, and our bark was good,  
And so pang was our pearly prow,  
When we could not spiel the brow of the waves,  
We needilit them through below.

As fast as the hail, as fast as the gale,  
As fast as the midnight leme,  
We bore through the breast of the bursting swell,  
Or fluffit in the floating faem.

And when to the Norroway shore we wan,  
We mounted our steeds of the wind ;  
And we splashed the flood, and we darned the wood,  
And we left the shower behind.

Fleet is the roe on the green Lomond,  
And swift is the cowering grewe,  
The rein-deer dun can eithly run,  
When the hounds and the horns pursue.

But neither the roe, nor the rein-deer dun,  
The hind, nor the cowering grewe,  
Could fly over mountain, moor, and dale,  
As our braw steeds they flew.

The dales were deep, and the Doffrines steep,  
And we rose to the skies e'e-bree ;  
White, white was our road, that was never trode,  
O'er the snows of eternity !

And when we came to the Lapland lone,  
The fairies were all in array ;  
For all the genii of the North  
Were keeping their holiday.

The warlock men and the weird women,  
And the fays of the wood and the steep,  
And the phantom-hunters all were there,  
And the mermaids of the deep.

And they washed us all with the witch-water,  
 Distilled from the moorland dew,  
 While our beauty bloomed like the Lapland rose  
 That wild in the forest grew.”

Nothing in the picturesque of superstition has ever surpassed this, save perhaps the following, which is, however, in quite another vein :—

“Bonny Kilmeny gaed up the glen,  
 But it was not to meet Duneira’s men,  
 Nor the rosy monk of the isle to see,  
 For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be.  
 It was only to hear the yorline sing,  
 And pull the cress-flower round the spring ;  
 The scarlet-hyp, and the hind-berrye,  
 And the nut that hangs from the hazel tree ;  
 For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be.  
 But lang may her mother look owre the wa’,  
 And lang may she seek in the greenwood shaw ;  
 Lang the laird of Duneira blame,  
 And lang, lang greet or Kilmeny come hame !

When many a day had come and fled,  
 When grief grew calm, and hope was dead,  
 When mass for Kilmeny’s soul had been sung,  
 When the bedesman had prayed, and the death-bell rung,  
 Late, late in a gloaming, when all was still,  
 When the fringe was red on the western hill,  
 The wood was sere, the moon on the wane,  
 The reek of the cot hung over the plain,  
 Like a little wee cloud in the world its lane ;  
 When the ingle lowed with an eerie leme,  
 Late, late in the gloaming Kilmeny came hame !”

She had been carried away, in her sinless beauty, to Fairyland, where

“The sky was a dome of crystal bright,  
 The fountain of vision, and fountain of light ;  
 The emerald fields were of dazzling glow,  
 And the flowers of everlasting blow.

And after remaining seven years—the term of probation there—had been permitted once more to revisit earth. Such was her reception by the inferior creation, that—

“ —Wherever her peaceful form appeared,  
 The wild beasts of the hill were cheered :  
 The wolf played blithely round the field,  
 The lordly bison lowed and kneeled ;  
 The dun-deer wooed, with manner bland,  
 And cowered beneath her lily hand ;  
 And when at even the woodlands rung,  
 When hymns of other worlds she sung,  
 In ecstasy of sweet devotion,  
 Oh, then the glen was all in motion.

The wild beasts of the forest came,  
 Broke from their bughts and folds the tame,  
 And gazed around, charmed and amazed ;  
 Even the dull cattle croon'd and gazed,  
 And murmured and looked with anxious pain,  
 For something the mystery to explain.  
 The buzzard came, with the throstle-cock ;  
 The corbie left her houff in the rock ;  
 The blackbird along with the eagle flew ;  
 The hind came tripping o'er the dew ;  
 The wolf and the kid their play began,  
 And the tod, and the lamb, and the leveret ran ;  
 The hawk and the heron above them hung,  
 And the merle and the mavis forsook their young ;  
 And all in a peaceful ring were hurled :  
 It was like an eve in a sinless world !

When a month and a day had come and gane,  
 Kilmeny sought the green-wood wene ;  
 There laid her down on the leaves so green,  
 And Kilmeny on earth was never more seen.  
 But all the land were in fear and dread,  
 For they knew not whether she was living or dead.  
 It was not her home, and she could not remain ;  
 She left this world of sorrow and pain,  
 And returned to the land of thought again.”

One word of remark on poetry such as this were superfluous: it appeals at once, and that triumphantly, to the heart and the imagination, and carries the calculating critic fairly off his feet, by a *coup-de-main*. But, of course, it was only in his transient fits of inspiration that the Shepherd thus wrote.

The poetry of James Hogg is not that of philosophic sentiment, like Wordsworth's; nor of reflection, like that of Bowles; nor of minute painting, like that of Crabbe; nor of picturesque action, like that of Scott. We should assign him a place between the Claud-like delicate fairy dreaminess of Wilson, and the Salvator Rosa demonology of Coleridge; although without the classic taste of the one or the gorgeous magnificence of the other. He never reveals to us the human affections and passions in the whirlwind of their operations; nor does he exhibit any intimate knowledge of the constituted forms of society. His portraitures of men and manners are, in general, sad affairs. Like Coleridge and Shelley, almost the whole of his power lay in his wonderful imagination. He delights in the vague and abstracted; in the picturesque and ideal; in the wild, lonely, savage features of nature; in the benighted traveller on the purple moors; in the Covenanter on the sea-beat cliff; the shepherd on the grassy mountain; the plaided clansman beside the sepulchral cairn in the glen; the enthusiast waiting the appearance of the sheeted spectre by the moonlight stream. His muse was a sojourner by the foaming cataract and the roaring ocean, by the scathed forest and the barren wilderness. She is conversant only with our terrors and superstitions—our "fierce wars and faithful loves"—with the romance of human action, the poetry of life.

We come naturally next to say a few words of Allan Cunningham, another racy and original poet, who also sprang from the bosom of the people, and whose genius

was as sterling as it was peculiar. Allan Cunningham stands in direct contrast to James Hogg in this, that his best poetry, like that of Robert Burns, was composed in early life, and before he had emerged from obscurity, or become at all conversant with the conventional forms of the world. His vein was intrinsically and genuinely a native one, and could only be spoiled by artificial cultivation. His prose improved by practice ; but his verse lost the peculiar characteristics which originally gave it value. He seemed himself unaware of this, and kept writing on, in the crawling crowds of London, about the pastoral Nith, and the heights of Blackwood, and the groves of Dalswinton ; but in a far different tone from that to which he had tuned his youthful harp, "among the primrose banks of the bonny Cowehill," or beside the blood-stained lintels of "Carlisle Yetts." Indeed, I doubt much if any injury would have accrued to Cunningham's fame had he dropped his poetic mantle before crossing the Border, and trusted his reputation to the early ballads published in Cromek's "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song ;" for by these, as a poet, will he be chiefly remembered. His latter vein was thinner and weaker ; he wrote more ambitiously, but more diffusely ; and, in attempting polish, he lost raciness. His larger and more elaborate compositions, his "Sir Marmaduke Maxwell," and his "Maid of Elvar," with many scintillations of genius, with many diamond sparks of true inspiration, want thews and sinews ; and, at best, are unsatisfactory. He is sadly deficient in plot and constructiveness ; and although his eloquence and enthusiasm never flag, the reader wearies, and cannot help deploring that these are often misdirected. He knew not where to stop, and continually perilled success from lack of critical discretion.

This goes far to account for the fact that all his happiest compositions are in the shape of ballad and song, where he was necessarily compelled to be concise

and concentrated. His fine peculiar genius was intensely national ; and he had the wonderful faculty of completely throwing himself back into, and identifying his feelings and thoughts with, those of bygone generations. Amid these, as viewed by him in the mirror of imagination, we feel that he is far more secure and at home than amid the imperfectly understood manners of his own day, while with the things of departed ages neither himself nor his readers have any misgivings about the tone or colouring of his pictures ; for, when reality fails he brightens them over with the tints of fairyland, or overshadows them with the "gloom of earthquake and eclipse."

The genius of Allan Cunningham was essentially lyrical. In the narrative and descriptive his drawing is continually out of keeping ; and he lacks discretion or discernment. He was fond of large surfaces, and of painting in al-fresco ; whereas his forte lay in miniature, and on small canvass. He mistook himself for an Etty, when he might have been a Noel Paton.

His early poems, "The Mermaid of Galloway," "She's gane to dwell in Heaven," "The Lord's Marie," and "Bonny Lady Anne," are perfect gems—are in their way unsurpassed and inimitable ; and scarcely less may be said of his songs—" 'Tis Hame, hame, hame," "The Sun rises bright in France," "The wee, wee German Lairdie," "A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea," and "My Nannie, O." The following very characteristic fragment has all the picturesque setting and artless pathos of the genuine traditionary ballad :—

"Gane were but the winter cauld,  
 And gane were but the snaw,  
 I could sleep in the wild-woods,  
 Where primroses blaw.

Cauld's the snaw at my head,  
 And cauld at my feet,

And the finger o' death's at my e'en,  
Faulding them to sleep.

Let nane tell my father,  
Or my mither sae dear ;  
I'll meet them baith in heaven,  
At the spring o' the year."

Apart from mere scholarship, we know what Shakspeare and Scott, what Burns and Bloomfield, what Hogg and Cunningham were, as poets. And the question naturally arises, do Science and Poetry progress together ?

Poetry may be defined to be—Objects or subjects seen through the mirror of imagination, and descanted on in harmonious language. Such a definition is far from perfect, but it may be accepted as a sufficiently comprehensive one ; and, if so, it must be admitted that the very exactness of knowledge is a barrier to the laying on of that colouring by which alone facts can be invested with the illusive hues of poetry. The proof of this would be a reference to what has been generally regarded as the best poetry of the best authors in ancient and modern times. Without interfering with the laws of the world of mind—which, from the days of Plato to Kant, seem involved in the same cloud of uncertainty—let me turn to the external world, and it will be at once apparent that the precision of science, as shown in geographical limits, and in the recognised laws of matter, would at once annul the grandest portions of the Psalms—of Isaiah—of Ezekiel—of Job—of the Revelation. It would convert the mythology of Hesiod and Homer, the "Medea" of Euripides, the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid, and the "Atys" of Catullus, into rhapsodies ; and transform "The Faery Queen" of Spenser, "The Tempest" and "Midsummer Night's Dream" of Shakspeare, the "Comus" of Milton, "The Fatal Sisters" of Gray,



“The Ancient Mariner” of Coleridge, the “Thalaba” of Southey, the “Laodamia” of Wordsworth, the “Edith and Nora” of Wilson, the “Kilmeny” of Hogg, and the “Sensitive Plant” of Shelley, in fact, all high imaginative verse—into tissues of rant, bombast, and fustian.

In the contest between Bowles and Byron on the invariable principles of poetry, the lesser poet, as I hinted in a preceding lecture, had infinitely the best of the argument; but he did not make the most of it by illustration and example—for no one could be hardy enough to maintain, that a castle newly erected is equally poetical with a similar one in ruins, like Tantallan, Dunotter, or Dunstaffnage; or a man-of-war, fresh from the stocks, with one that has braved the battle and the breeze—with Duncan’s “Venerable,” or Nelson’s “Victory.” Stone and lime, as well as timber and sail-cloth, require associations to raise them beyond prose. Push the theory to the extreme, and you cannot help proving Pope a greater poet than Shakspeare; and, with regard to Pope’s own performances, it would make his “Essay on Criticism” equal to his “Eloïse,” for it is written with the same care and power; and it would show that Darwin’s “Botanic Garden,” and Hayley’s “Triumphs of Temper,” might stand on the same shelf with Cowper’s “Task,” or Thomson’s “Seasons.” Wherever light penetrates the obscure, and illuminates the uncertain, we may rest assured that a demesne has been lost to the realms of imagination.

That poetry can never be robbed of its chief ornaments and elements, I firmly believe—for these elements are the immutable principles of our nature; and, while men breathe, there is room for a new Sappho or a new Simonides to melt, and for a new Tyrtaeus and a new Pindar to excite and inspire; nor, in reference to the present state of literature, although I shrewdly doubt whether either Marmion or Childe Harold would, even

now, be hailed, as we delight to know that they were hailed some thirty or forty years ago, still I do not despair of poetry ultimately recovering from the staggering blows which science has inflicted in the shape of steam conveyance—of electro-magnetism—of geological exposition—of political economy—of statistics—in fact, by a series of disenchantments. Original genius in due time must, from new elements, frame new combinations ; and these may be at least what the kaleidoscope is to the rainbow, or an explosion of hydrogen in the gasometer to a flash of lightning on the hills. But this alters not my position—that all facts are prose, until coloured by imagination or passion. From physic we have swept away alchemy, incantation, and cure by the royal touch ; from divinity exorcism, and purgatory, and excommunication ; and from law, the trial by wager of battle, the ordeal by touch, and the mysterious confessions of witchcraft. In the foamy seas, we can never more expect to see Proteus leading out his flocks ; nor, in the dimpling stream, another Narcissus admiring his own fair face ; nor Diana again descending on Latmos to Endymion. We cannot hope another Una, “making a sunshine in the shady place ;” nor another Macbeth, meeting with other witches on the blasted heath ; nor another Faust, wandering amid the mysterious sights and sounds of another Mayday night. Robin Hoods and Rob Roys are incompatible with sheriffs and the county police. Rocks are stratified by geologists, exactly as satins are measured by mercers ; and Echo, no longer a vagrant classic nymph, is compelled quietly to succumb to the laws of Acoustics.

## LECTURE III.

Ballad Poetry.—The Revival of the Romantic School.—Sir Walter Scott ; his poetry and the feudal system ; his popularity and imitators ; his nationality and transcendent genius.—The Lay—Marmion—Lady of the Lake—Lord of the Isles—Songs and Ballads.—Professor Wilson and Lord Byron:—Isle of Palms—City of the Plague—Fairy Legends—Unimore.—Extracts, *Morning Picture*—*The Course of Grief*.—Thomas Campbell and James Montgomery ; —The Pleasures of Hope—Lyrical Poems—Gertrude of Wyoming.—Early decline of Campbell's powers ; his classical elegance and high standard of taste.—Specimens from *O'Connor's Child*, and *Stanzas on Battle of Alexandria*.—James Montgomery's Wanderer of Switzerland—West Indies—World before the Flood—Greenland—Pelican Island—and Lyrics.—Extracts, *The Sky of the South*—*Prayer*.—The legitimate aims of poetry.—The use and abuse of genius.

COMMON to every human heart there is a certain class of emotions, the expressions of which “turn as they leave the lips to song ;” and hence the primitive form of poetry in the ballad. It is also to be remarked, that throughout all countries the themes of these ballads are the same—“Ladye love, and war, renown, and knightly worth.”

So large a portion even of the poetry of Homer takes this shape, that it has been seized upon as a leading feature in the controversy regarding the unity of the authorship of the “Iliad” and “Odyssey”—a controversy first started by Scaliger in his “Poetics,” and afterwards followed out by Wolf in his “Prologomena ;” and many of these separate gems of narrative were by Dr Maginn—who at same time repudiated the heresy—disjoined from the context, and translated under the

title of "Homeric Ballads." Mr Macaulay thinks it highly probable that the traditionary legends of primitive Rome also existed in the same popular form, and hence their reappearance, under his plastic touch, in the "Ancient Lays." It has been the same "from Zembla to the line;" for, among others, Davis, in his "Researches," mentions those of the Chinese; Sir William Jones, the Persian and Arabic; Leyden, the Malay and Sanscrit; Weber and Jamieson present the Swedish, German, and Danish; Herbert, the Icelandic and Norse; Bowring, the Russian, Polish, and Hungarian; Lockhart and Frere, the Spanish; Percy, Ellis, and Ritson, the English; Hailes, Scott, Motherwell, and Robert Chambers, the Scottish.

In every case these songs and ballads are valuable, not only as poetical, but as historical records. They show the idiosyncracies of a people—the habits, customs, and manners, which "long wont" has metamorphosed almost into a second nature; and the peculiarities and circumstances which have gone towards the formation of national character at different times in particular regions of the world.

To them Scotland in some measure owes its greatest poet, in so far at least as determining the bent of his genius was concerned; for it was while listening with rapt ear to the stirring or plaintive minstrelsy of the Border districts that the fire of song awakened in the young heart of Walter Scott; and his first great appearance was in presenting these traditionary stores in a collected form to the world, accompanied by imitations of their style and manner, so accurate and striking as at once to prove the close study he had given them, and the depth of that impression which the originals had made on his feelings and fancy. In many of these strange wild fragments and relics, there is a pathos and a sublimity which, we are not ashamed to confess, constrain our thoughts into those *lacunæ*—those profound

hidden recesses of man's nature and condition—far more effectually than ever was achieved by more artistic strains. Their charm lies in their intense nature—the only intense or earnest school I am inclined to recognise; now by their pathos awakening feelings too deep for tears—as in “The Flowers of the Forest” and “Ellen of Kirkconnel;” and now by their dauntless and heroic outbursts, *dirling* the heart-strings like the martial *tir-a-la* of a trumpet—as in “The Battle of Otterburn” and “The Douglas Tragedy;” giving, as it were, an assurance of inspiration, and almost realising the magical attributes of Kilspindie the Harper, or of Orpheus of old, or of the Syrens three, “amid the flowery-kirtled Naiades.” To add to the interest of all this, the authors, even in name and whereabouts, have utterly perished and passed away, and their lays come to our ears like the bodiless voice of Cona—Eolian sounds circling the misty mountain-tops, or murmuring through the pastoral valleys—unclaimed relics floating down the stream of time, like drift-wood to the ocean.

At this shrine Scott kindled the torch of his genius, and set himself in earnest to work out scenes of interest, and images of beauty and power, from the warblings of scalds, and bards, and troubadours, and minnesingers—in short, from the vast mass of materials which were open to him in the hitherto almost unappropriated and rich vast quarry of the feudal system; and the first grand result came forth in “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”—a poem which at once took public opinion by storm, and distanced, utterly distanced, all competition in the race of popularity. Whiteheads, Pyes, Hooles, Hayleys, Darwins, and Sewards, were at a *coup* swept from the literary theatre stage, like the unoccupied chairs and shifting scenes, and we were called in at once to witness the death and burial of Boileau and French criticism. “The strain now heard was of a higher mood;” it was one of freedom and freshness and force.

By a wave of his wand, the magician repeopled his country with the burghers of the past—regarrisoned each time-worn castle with helmet and spear, and buff-jerkin—reawoke the melodious choir in each grey crumbling abbey—and gave back to Night her ghost, her witch, and her fairy,—in whose mystic presence Scott hesitated not to say of the most stalwart knight, Sir William of Deloraine—of one who feared not the face of man—that

“ — somewhat was he chilled with dread,  
And the hair did bristle upon his head.

In short, the only analogy to the sweeping current of his verse is to be found in his own description of a stream swollen by autumnal rains, which

“ — from fetters freed,  
Down from the mountains did roaring come ;  
Each wave was crested with tawny foam,  
Like the mane of a chestnut steed.”

In energy and originality, and in affluence of thought and matter, “The Lay” takes the lead, in excellence as in priority of appearance, of all Scott’s other great works. In it he is like a man who has opened up a rich vein of gold and precious metal, and is prodigally lavish of the treasures around him—the first digger in a newly-discovered California. It is not only fine in passages, but gorgeously rich through all its parts. His figures have the bold outline and ornate costume of Vandyke ; while his landscapes combine the freshness of Gainsborough, and the picturesqueness of Turner, with the massy shadows of Thomson of Duddingstone. As if the subject in hand was not enough, each canto opens, by way of voluntary, with a burst so vigorous and fresh as can only be likened to the luxury of vegetation on the first digging over of a fertile virgin soil ; and the description of Melrose Abbey by moonlight—the apostrophe to love—the comparison of the Teviot to

the tide of life—and the invocation to Caledonia—have only to be once read to remain for ever impressed on the memory of all true lovers of the lyre.

“Breathes there a man with soul so dead,  
 Who never to himself hath said,  
     This is my own—my native land !  
 Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,  
 As home his footsteps he hath turned,  
     From wandering on a foreign strand ?  
 If such there be, go mark him well ;  
 For him no minstrel raptures swell ;  
 High though his titles, proud his name,  
 Boundless his wealth as wish could claim,  
 Despite these titles, power, and pelf,  
 The wretch, concentred all in self,  
 Living shall forfeit fair renown,  
 And doubly dying, shall go down  
 To the vile earth from which he sprung,  
 Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.”

With less of enthusiasm and splendour in parts, “Marmion” surpasses “The Lay” as a whole in varied tissue of incident, in mellowness of colouring, and in ingenuity of plot. It is painted on a broader canvass, yet is more coherent and regular ; its foregrounds are more artistically shaded, and its general tone more softened and elaborated. It is also more diversified in action, and displays a larger, a more extended insight into human character. In depth of interest, and in impress of dread reality, the subterranean judgment-scene at Holy Island may stand comparison with the disinterring of Michael Scott in Melrose Abbey ; and the dying speech of Constance passes from the pathetic to the sublime in its melting tenderness, its energetic passion, its prophetic denuncements, and its heart-crushing despair.

“The Lady of the Lake” is cast in a more dramatic form. It is a succession of beautifully painted scenes,

where contrasts are admirably brought out—the Highlands and the Lowlands—the Gael and the Saxon ; and in mere story it ranks above either of its predecessors, commencing with a stag-hunt to entrap the gentlemen, and concluding with a marriage to propitiate the ladies. The night-rencontre between Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu is in Scott's very best manner ; it is finely conceived ; and the collateral incidents are made to develop themselves with that ingenuity and telling effect which remind us of Fielding's consummate art in the management of plot, and bespeak the master's hand. There is something like melodramatic straining, I think, in the marriage and death scenes, which abide the perambulations of the Fiery Cross ; yet I am perfectly aware, at the same time, that it would be next to impossible to have otherwise given such a striking illustration of the devotedness of the Highland clans to their chieftains, as is there exhibited—a devotedness romantically proved in 1745. Perhaps the finest thing in the poem—and it abounds with fine things—is the lay of Allan Bane in the prison cell of the dying Roderick ; the variations of whose melody imitate the vicissitudes of the battle-field—now bursting forth in stormy tones of thunder—now undulating in mournful murmurs, like the sigh of the winter wind in the forest, and now hurrying imagination, as it were, from the crashing onset on through the crossing and conflict of sword and targe to the struggle for life and death—and on, still on, to the waning sounds of defeat, the implorations for quarter, and the dirge-like wailing over the departed.

"Rokeby" may be taken in extract to great advantage ; but, as a whole, it is less felicitous than the magnificent works now glanced at. A giant on his native soil, Scott had here for the first time crossed the Border, and, like Samson in bonds, seemed somewhat shorn of his strength, or at least of his confidence in it ; for he could not but feel himself surrounded with new



associations. The savage character of Bertram, and the gentle one of Wilfred, are alike exquisitely drawn—the former a compound of his own William of Deloraine and Lord Marmion, with an additional dash of savagery; the latter of Beattie’s “Edwin” in the *Minstrel*, and of Mackenzie’s “Man of Feeling,” Harley; and they indicate much of that intuitive or preceptive power which Scott afterwards triumphantly displayed in his matchless immortal prose tales. As a descriptive poem, it is rich to luxuriance; but neither there nor in “The Lord of the Isles”—grand and majestic, in parts, though it also be—have we the same ample measure of poetical riches “heaped up, pressed down, and yet flowing over,” which forms the striking characteristic of “The Lay” and “Marmion.”

“The Lord of the Isles” is a misnomer; for certainly King Robert the Bruce is not only the hero of the poem, but the greatest part of its interest centres in him. He is drawn with minute historical accuracy; and his coolness, his sagacity, and determined resolution, are brought out in fine contrast with the more boisterous and unbridled daring of his brother Edward. “The Lord of the Isles” is himself perplexing, and his bride Edith unsatisfactory—neither carries our sympathies along with them; and, finely as Bannockburn is described, it lacks the bold vigour and glowing picturesqueness of Flodden. The most strange and striking portions of the work are those which relate to the Isle of Skye, where, in depicting desolate and savage grandeur, and a tribe of inhabitants “with minds as barren, and with hearts as hard,” Scott taxes himself to the very height of his powers, and with triumphant success.

Besides these great, and, in their walk, hitherto unrivalled poems, Sir Walter Scott left others—“Don Roderick,” “The Bridal of Triermain,” “Harold the Dauntless,” and lyrics, songs, and miscellanies—amply sufficient in themselves to have secured a high reputation

for any other writer, but which can only be regarded as second-rate, when classed with the master-pieces of his own genius. Of his ballads, the finest are "The Eve of St John," itself an epic in miniature; the dirge of "Rosabelle" in the Lay; "Lochinvar" in Marmion; "Alice Brand" in the Lady of the Lake; "Brigial Banks" in Rokeby; and the third part of "Thomas the Rhymer" in the Minstrelsy, one of the earliest attempts of its author, but one which, in poetical excellence, whether we regard style, manner, or matter, he never surpassed; and its silvery cadences, unrivalled in their flow, save by Coleridge's "Genevieve," have been the source of many a fond but futile imitation. In song-writing, Sir Walter Scott is, as in all other things, great; but there even he must yield, as all others must, to Robert Burns, who is, in that department, indeed "above all Greek, above all Roman fame,"—a more than Simonides in pathos, as in his "Highland Mary;" a more than Tyrtæus in fire, as in his "Scots wha ha'e wi' Wallace bled;" and a softer than Sappho in love, as in his—

"Had we never loved so kindly,  
Had we never loved so blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

I have given one of Sir Walter Scott's trumpet tones; now for a gentle whisper from his lute,—*"The Hymn of the Hebrew Maid:"*—

"When Israel, of the Lord beloved,  
Out from the land of bondage came,  
Her father's God before her moved,  
An awful guide in smoke and flame.  
By day, along the astonished lands,  
The cloudy pillar glided slow;  
By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands  
Returned the fiery column's glow.

There rose the choral hymn of praise,  
 And trump and timbrel answered keen,  
 And Sion's daughters poured their lays,  
 With priest's and warrior's voice between.  
 No portents now our foes amaze,  
 Forsaken Israel wanders lone ;  
 Our fathers would not know *Thy* ways,  
 And *Thou* hast left them to their own.

But, present still, though now unseen ;  
 When brightly shines the prosperous day,  
 Be thoughts of *Thee* a cloudy screen  
 To temper the deceitful ray.  
 And oh ! when stoops on Judah's path  
 In shade and storm the frequent night,  
 Be *Thou*, long-suffering, slow to wrath,  
 A burning and a shining light !

Our harps we left by Babel's streams,  
 The tyrant's jest, the Gentile's scorn ;  
 No censer round our altar beams,  
 And mute our timbrel, trump, and horn.  
 But Thou hast said, the blood of goat,  
 The flesh of rams, I will not prize ;  
 A contrite heart, an humble thought,  
 Are mine accepted sacrifice."

From the appearance of "The Lay" through the series of years to 1812, Sir Walter Scott reigned the undisputed "Napoleon of the realms of rhyme ;" and the swarm of imitators which his success called forth would not be credited in after times, could not reference be made to the contemporary book-lists. Nine-tenths of these imitations were—as might have been expected—"voces et præterea nihil," mere bodiless echoes. A few had stamina, which endured for a season—as "Margaret of Anjou," "The fight of Falkirk," "Christina, the Maid of the South Seas," "The Legend of Iona," and some half-dozen others ; but the *battalia* of romances in six cantos,

with historical notes, whose name was legion, have, without one exception now occurring to me, long since gone to the tomb of the Capulets, having, after lying undisturbed many long years in their dusty sheets on the subterranean shelves of bookseller's warehouses, been at last bargained for, taken compassion on, and entombed by that tender-hearted body of United Samaritans, the pastry-cooks and trunk-liners.

This body of romancing rhymsters, however they might otherwise differ, seemed harmoniously to adhere to the elements of the following recipe:—Take a fair and love-lorn damsel—a valorous knight of the six-foot club, in black or white armour, with plumes *vice versa*; a fiery-eyed horse, that neighs well, richly caparisoned; two thin pale nuns, and a bold fat friar; a leash of stag-hounds; an ivied castle, with a moat, drawbridge, and grim-looking donjon keep, in which last place a forlorn captive; warders, grooms, and serving-men *ad libitum*; a dark oak-forest, with a hairy hermit in sackcloth, who feeds on wild honey and cresses; a ruined abbey, palpably haunted; and a “Wizard of the North.” Throw in, for seasoning, according to current taste, a shipwreck; a storm of thunder, with forked-lightning of the bluest; a ferocious murder, and a gorgeous marriage; and, having commingled well, serve up to the public.

Sir Walter Scott was characterised by the manly straightforwardness of his genius; by his disdain of petty ornament; by his dealing with grand first principles; by the simple majesty of his conceptions; by his vigour of execution; by his boundless acquired knowledge; by his unequalled eye for the picturesque; by felicitous combination of incident; by striking individuality of protraiture, alike in heroic action, and in melting tenderness—in short, by all the highest qualities which have ever distinguished the mighty masters of the lyre; and, if we are to translate the term “poet” into “maker,” or inventor,” and are thus enabled to add

to his productions in verse those novels and romances which have delighted the world—more than half of the whole accumulated writings of the last fifty years put together—I at once put him far beyond Byron, Wordsworth, or any other competitor for supremacy, on a throne by the side of Shakspeare—to be regarded at least as a younger brother of the prince of all the world's poets. And yet, of all writers in verse, from Homer and Chaucer, his grand prototypes—the former in ancient, the latter in modern times—to Byron and Wordsworth, his mightiest cotemporary rivals, there is not one whom it would be less fair to judge of by mere extract than Scott; for his power lay far more in the comprehensiveness of his design, and the general mastery of his execution, than in separate excellencies or in detached beauties.

It has been a fashion of recent years for some people, about as capable of appreciating "Marmion" as the "Iliad" or "The Divine Comedy," to underrate Scott's poetry, as compared with his prose; nay, to talk slightingly of it, as being careless, loose, and superficial. Anything from dunces! but will it be credited that Hazlitt, who, with all his violent prejudices, certainly was none, should set Scott down as "a mere narrative and descriptive poet, garrulous of the old time;" or that Leigh Hunt, himself a poet, should say of his verse, that it is "a little thinking conveyed in a great many words?" Such oracular nonsense, however, is not recommended to us even as novel. Be it remembered that Waller, also himself a poet, alludes to the author of "Paradise Lost" as "one John Milton, a blind old schoolmaster;" and that Voltaire characterises Shakspeare as "an inspired barbarian." Individuals may err, but the great law of the world is ever ultimately just; and (mirabile dictu!) Milton, Shakspeare, and even Scott, yet survive! Great merit may exist for some time without recognition; and, on the contrary, great temporary popularity may

be acquired by what is utterly worthless ; but I challenge one instance from the whole history of literature, where that popularity, whether slow or sudden, which was not deserved, has continued to endure. And assuredly Scott's must, while a single human heart continues to beat.

Of the Novels and Romances, those glowing, glorious, and immortal tales, which make us proud to think that we are of the same country as their author, it is not my province here to speak ; but be it remembered that the fame of Scott had penetrated to the ends of the earth as a poet, and as a poet only, long before a single page of these was written ; that that poetry is now part of the stock-literature of the world, and has been translated into the languages of almost every civilised nation. It would, therefore, be a mere waste of words to discuss a question regarding which the great bulk of mankind seem to have come to an unhesitating verdict, whatever critics have done. So truly mighty, in my opinion, was the genius of our countryman, that we are even yet too near him to regard it in its just proportions ; and I have not abated, by one iota, in the admiration which induced me, twenty years ago, to inscribe under his portrait these six lines—

“ Brother of Homer, and of him  
 On Avon's banks, by twilight dim  
 Who dreamt immortal dreams, and took  
 From Nature's hand her storied book :  
 Earth hath not seen, Time may not see,  
 Till ends his march, such other three.”

From 1805, when the “Lay of the Last Minstrel” appeared, we find British poetry in its meridian splendour, with a host of distinguished aspirants in the field—Campbell, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Moore, Southey, Coleridge, Rogers, Montgomery, not to mention several other scarcely less bright names : but Scott far, and deservedly

far, beyond all in the race of popularity. In 1812, however, something like a restoration of the balance of power began to show itself. Two young competitors, who were afterwards mightily to influence literature, entered the arena—Lord Byron in his “Childe Harold,” and John Wilson in his “Isle of Palms;” and it is difficult even yet to say which of the two was most distinguished for general scope of mind, for imaginative and intellectual power. Byron’s was remarkable for its passion and intensity; Wilson’s for its catholicity and comprehensiveness. The former concentrated its rays to a focus; the latter scattered them abroad like a mirror. Had both continued, as they began, to cull their laurels from the field of poetry alone, this question of natural capacity might have been one of easier solution. Byron, persevering to do so, accomplished wonders in the course of his unfortunately brief, impassioned, impetuous, and chequered after-life. Wilson, on the contrary, in little more than four years from his appearance as a poet—for “The City of the Plague” was published in 1816—and while still under thirty, may be said to have forsaken the muse, and to have turned the Nile-like and seemingly inexhaustible current of his mind into all the variously diverging channels of literature and philosophy. With Byron, poetry was all in all; and he wrote not only with amazing power, but with amazing fluency—indeed no man, dying at thirty-seven, ever wrote so much with such an impress. With Wilson, it was only one of the phases of his many-sided mind: and, when he may be said to have left the field, that mind was in fact scarcely out of its juvenescence; as demonstrated by its subsequent more matured and remarkable achievements. On these, however, I dare not at present enter; and must confine myself merely to a few outlinear characteristics of his poetry.

Unlike Crabbe, who delighted to expatiate on the failings and frailties of our nature; or Byron, whose region

of power was in the tempest and darkness of the passions ; or Scott, who dazzled by the picturesque rapidity of narrative, the muse of Wilson deals only with the softer, gentler, purer feelings, with the more refined and delicate perceptions. Even in the description of human wretchedness and of depravity, he cannot help mingling some ethereal and redeeming touches ; mid the roar of the troubled waters of the spirit, a still small voice is ever heard whispering " peace ;" through the wind-swept masses of the heavy twilight clouds gloriously peeps out the golden evening star—an omen of faith and serenity.

Wordsworth philosophises on the aspects of nature, rather than describes them ; Southey gives the landscape itself with the eye and art of a painter ; Wilson's still life seems like the conjurations of a dream—soft, silent, beautiful :—

“ Towering o'er these beauteous woods,  
Gigantic rocks were ever dimly seen,  
Breaking with solemn grey, the tremulous green,  
And frowning far in castellated pride ;  
While hastening to the ocean, hoary floods  
Sent up a thin and radiant mist between,  
Softening the beauty that it could not hide.  
Lo ! higher still the stately palm-trees rise  
Chequering the clouds with their unbending stems,  
And o'er the clouds, amid the dark-blue skies,  
Lifting their rich unfading diadems.”

By the youthful genius of Wilson it seems to have been felt as something like sin to approach the confines of guilt and crime, or to delineate any of the darker and more repulsive features of human nature. His contemplations are all of the soft and serene—even his descriptions are confined to the fair and beautiful ; the rugged under his touch acquires a moonlight shading ; sorrow becomes sanctified ; and the thunder-storm, along with its devouring lightning, has ever its fertilising shower. It is his bathing all his characters in



this "purple light of love," which in some measure unfits Professor Wilson from shining as a poet of consummate dramatic power—a power which his other writings attest his boundless possession of—and which, with all the varied beauty which commanded the admiration of Byron, Moore, and Jeffrey, makes "The City of the Plague" read more like a poem than a drama; in other words, renders it a composition embodying sentiment rather than action. Whatever may be their peculiar features, whatever the part they have to perform, his personages arrange themselves into two great classes—those dignified by virtue, and those degraded by vice; the former surpassing mere men, and approximating the nature of ministers of light; the other fallen from a high estate, yet still endowed with many redeeming traits, and, after all, scarcely less than "archangels ruined."

While in the act of composition, the poet's mind seemed to have been worked up to a kind of reverie, in which he saw the material world, with its delightful valleys and magnificent mountains, its murmuring rivers and rolling oceans, its sheeted lakes and umbrageous forests outstretched before him as on a vast map, in phantasmagorial pageantry. Nor less peculiar were his views of the moral physiognomy of man, whom, as I have said, he has scarcely the heart to paint as the victim of original sin; but as, even in infancy, returning in the visions of sleep to an ante-natal heaven. Yet he is by no means so great an exclusionist or mannerist as Wordsworth, although they have always been, and ever will be, regarded as congenial spirits, separated by their distinctive qualities of original power. In the descriptive portions of his writings, however, Wilson is much more exuberant in imagery; and thus more nearly approaches Southey, especially in "The Isle of Palms," where his discursive fancy luxuriates in regions not unallied in character to those

exhibited in "Thalaba" and "Kehama." But over Southey he has this excellence, that his style is always suited to his subject; he never clothes the trivial in the pomp of majestic words, nor debases the lofty by meanness of expression, or puerility of epithet. His pathos is always of the heart—simple, deep, and touching; and we may say of his poetry, in this respect, as he has himself said of another, that—

"The songs he poured were sad and wild;  
And while they would have soothed a child,  
That soon bestows its tears,  
A deeper pathos in them lay  
That would have moved a hermit grey,  
Bowed down with holy years."

The grand characteristics of the poetry of Wilson are delicacy of sentiment and ethereal elegance of description. He refines and elevates whatever he touches; and if in his hands common things lose their vulgar attributes, they are exchanged by him for something better. There is a wild harmony and an untamed splendour in his delineation of the aspects of nature; and among its beauties he riots and revels, always preferring the soft to the sullen, the gentle to the rugged. He is consequently, beyond all other poets, the bard of moonlight, in whose "flooding argentry" his muse seems never weary of dipping her pinions, or of marvelling at

"The fleecy clouds when their race is run,  
That hang in their own beauty blest,  
Mid the calm, that sanctifies the west,  
Around the setting sun."

Wilson makes a nearer approach, in tone of thought, to the Lake School, than to any other great class of writers; nor do his ideas of the philosophical principles of composition seem widely different from theirs; but

he never offends, like them, by endeavouring to extract sentiment from incongruous subjects. He may not, in any short effort, have attained the classical severity of the "Laodamia," or the magic wildness of the "Christabel;" but perhaps neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge could have so exquisitely painted, with such consistency throughout, the portrait of Magdalen in "The City of the Plague,"—so seraphically pure, so profoundly tender, so nobly self-devoted; of one whose path on earth is one of angel light—who, like Spenser's Una, "makes a sunshine in the shady place," and who, when hanging over her dying lover, is thus addressed by him—

——"the plumes  
Of thy affectionate bosom meet my heart,  
And all therein is quiet as the snow,  
At breathless midnight."

The great defect in the earlier poetry of Professor Wilson will be found to result from "the fatal facility" with which he found expression for his exuberant riches of thought and imagery. Life seemed to him a scene of enchantments; earth was a wilderness of sweets; language syllabled itself into music; and his imaginings thus spontaneously seemed to arrange themselves in verse. The welling fountain of his mind, instead of requiring to be pumped up, ever superabundantly overflowed; and his poems thus often read more like improvisations than compositions. It is difficult to say, therefore, whether the years of his sojourn beside Windermere were more beneficial or otherwise to his fame as a poet. Most assuredly they determined his tone of thought, and influenced, perhaps, more than he is himself aware of, his habits of looking on and regarding man and nature. This position is rendered less dubious, from his after works, in which he thought and reasoned more decidedly and independently for

himself ; and who can doubt, that he might not have from the first diffused through his poetry what he afterwards did through his prose,—that emphatic vigour, and ever-varying beauty of thought, that boundless amplitude of illustration, and that impassioned torrent-like eloquence—that despotic command alike over our reason and our sympathies, never conspicuous save in minds of the very highest order.

As a narrative poem, "The Isle of Palms" is somewhat desultory and sketchy. The story which runs through it is a mere slender thread, almost overstrung with the flowers of a luxuriant imagination. Its finer portions are the voyage, the shipwreck, and the island scenery ; its faults lie in its being too ornate—reminding us of the fine line in an old poet, which Mr Tennyson has since doubtless inadvertently appropriated—

"You scarce can see the grass for flowers."

"The City of the Plague" is more definite in outline, and more elaborately finished. Southey has thought fit to censure the selection of the subject, as being one unfit for poetry—himself having chosen several much more questionable. Otherwise thought Boccaccio, Dante, Moore, and Shelley. Such antecedent cavilling is quite absurd ; for praise or blame is almost entirely attachable to the mode in which subjects are handled ; and while a "Sofa" becomes a great moral engine in the hands of a Cowper, a Pedlar shines out a subtle philosopher in "The Excursion" of Wordsworth,—the bee having instinct to extract honey even from foxglove and nightshade. So fastidious, on the contrary, was Wilson's taste, and so great his horror at revolting details, that the principal objection to the poem in question is its too uniform tone of almost pastoral gentleness. So much so, indeed, that we are often inclined to wish that he would plunge into some more troubled element ; and had it remained to be written by him in the after

maturity of his intellectual strength, I doubt not his capability of having amazed as much by his power in awakening terror, and in picturing remorse, as he has done in this exquisite youthful effort in subduing to his mastery all our finer and gentler sympathies. As a narrative, “The City of the Plague” is much better proportioned and brought out than “The Isle of Palms.” From having therein subjected himself to the trammels of regular versification, his besetting demon—the discursive faculty—has less scope, and a feeling is consequently conveyed to the reader’s mind of more elaborate and sustained composition. We have less of that tone of delirium which, in common with the “Lyrical Ballads” of Wordsworth, prevades “The Isle of Palms,” together with a diction more classically pure and severe—yea, transparent as crystal.

In none of his multifarious writings is the peculiar genius of Wilson more exquisitely developed than in his “Lays from Fairyland,” where, in a region of spotless innocence, ethereal beauty, and serene repose, it is allowed to luxuriate “at its own sweet will.” His fairies are not those of Michael Drayton, nor Ben Jonson, nor of Shakspeare’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” nor of Bishop Corbett’s “Farewell,” nor of the “Young Tam Lane of Carterha’,” nor of John Leyden’s “Brown Man of the Muirs,” nor of James Hogg’s “Old David,” nor are they Herbert’s elves of the Scandinavian mythology,

“A tiny race, on mischief bent,  
Making men’s woes their merriment;”

nor the Peris of Thomas Moore’s Oriental Paradise; but a distinct creation of his own, beautiful “as atoms of the rainbow fluttering round,” and pure as the dew in the cup of the harebell; a species of angelic natures, sympathising with the sorrows, soothing the ills, and rejoicing in the moral triumphs of humanity. Over

these lays Wilson has poured out the whole exuberant riches of his fancy ; and he leads us through labyrinths of dazzling beauty, where all is innocent, calm, and pure—

"Like a cloudless eve in a sinless world."

The whole are fine, but perhaps the finest is that entitled "Edith and Nora," which contains separate pictures of "Morning" and of "Evening," as glowing and original as any descriptive passages in British poetry.

This is the morning picture in its serene beauty :—

"She hath risen up from her morning prayer,  
 And chained the waves of her golden hair,  
 Hath kissed her sleeping sister's cheek,  
 And breathed the blessing she might not speak,  
 Lest the whisper should break the dream that smiled  
 Round the snow-white brow of the sinless child.  
 Her radiant lamb and her purpling dove  
 Have ta'en their food from the hand they love ;  
 The low deep coo and the plaintive bleat  
 In the morning calm, how clear and sweet !  
 Ere the sun has warmed the dawning hours  
 She hath watered the glow of her garden flowers,  
 And welcomed the hum of the earliest bee  
 In the moist bloom working drowsily !  
 Then up the flow of the rocky rill  
 She trips away to the pastoral hill ;  
 And, as she lifts her glistening eyes,  
 In the joy of her heart, to the dewy skies,  
 She feels that her sainted parents bless  
 The life of their orphan shepherdess.

'Tis a lonely glen ! but the happy child  
 Hath friends whom she meets in the morning wild !  
 As on she trips, her native stream,  
 Like her, hath awoke from a joyful dream,  
 And glides away by her twinkling feet,  
 With a face as bright and a voice as sweet.  
 In the osier bank the ouzel sitting  
 Hath heard her steps, and away is flitting

From stone to stone, as she glides along,  
 Then sinks in the stream with a broken song.  
 The lapwing, fearless of his nest,  
 Stands looking round with his delicate crest ;  
 For a love-like joy is in his cry,  
 As he wheels and darts and glances by.

Is the heron asleep on the silvery sand  
 Of his little lake? Lo ! his wings expand  
 As a dreamy thought, and withouten dread  
 Cloud-like he floats o'er the maiden's head.  
 She looks to the birch-wood glade, and lo !  
 There is browsing there the mountain roe,  
 Who lifts up her gentle eyes, nor moves,  
 As on glides the form whom all nature loves.  
 Having spent in heaven an hour of mirth,  
 The lark drops down to the dewy earth,  
 And a silence smooths his yearning breast  
 In the gentle fold of his lowly nest ;  
 The linnet takes up the hymn, unseen  
 In the yellow broom, or the bracken green ;  
 And now, as the morning hours are glowing,  
 From the hill-side cots the cocks are crowing,  
 And the shepherd's dog is barking shrill  
 From the mist fast rising from the hill,  
 And the shepherd's self, with locks of grey,  
 Hath blessed the maiden on her way !  
 And now she sees her own dear flock  
 On a verdant mound beneath the rock,  
 All close together in beauty and love,  
 Like the small fair clouds in heaven above,  
 And her innocent soul, at the peaceful sight,  
 Is swimming o'er with a still delight.”

Among the other more elaborate productions of Professor Wilson, are “ Unimore, a dream of the Highlands ;” “ The Convict, a dramatic sketch ;” “ The Scholar's Funeral ;” “ The Angler's Tent ;” and an “ Evening in Furness Abbey.” The finest of his lesser poems strike me as being the “ Address to a Wild Deer ;” “ Lord Ronald's Child ;” “ The Village Deso-

late ;" "Lines in a Highland Glen ;" and "The Sleeping Child."

The following very beautiful extract, from the "Evening in Furness Abbey," is given as a specimen of Professor Wilson's blank verse.

"The day goes by,  
 On which our soul's beloved dies ! the day  
 On which the body of the dead is stretched  
 By hands that decked it when alive ; the day  
 On which the dead is shrouded, and the day  
 Of burial ;—one and all pass by ! The grave  
 Grows green ere long ; the churchyard seems a place  
 Of pleasant rest ; and all the cottages,  
 That keep for ever sending funerals  
 Within its gates, look cheerful every one,  
 As if the dwellers therein never died,  
 And this earth slumbered in perpetual peace.  
 For every sort of suffering there is sleep  
 Provided by a gracious Providence,  
 Save that of sin. We must at first endure  
 The simple woe of knowing they are dead—  
 A soul-sick woe, in which no comfort is,  
 And wish we were beside them in the dust !  
 That anguish dire cannot sustain itself,  
 But settles down into a grief that loves  
 And finds relief in unreprieved tears.  
 Then cometh sorrow like a Sabbath ! Heaven  
 Sends resignation down, and faith ; and last  
 Of all, there falls a kind oblivion  
 Over the going out of that sweet light  
 In which we had our being ; and the wretch,  
 Widow'd and childless, laughs in his old age,  
 Laughs and is merry, even among the tombs  
 Of all his kindred. Say not that the dead  
 Are unforgotten in their graves ! for all  
 Beneath the sun and moon is transitory ;  
 And sacred sorrow, like a shadow, flies,  
 As unsubstantial as the happiness  
 Whose loss we vainly wept !"



“Unimore” is, in some respects, the richest of all its author’s writings ; and in it his ideas seem to have poured upon him like the flood of the Solway. Indeed, we know not its equal anywhere, in Niagara-like copiousness of imagery and diction. Probably this is its defect, for it is somehow felt not to be altogether a successful poem. There is a lavishness of wealth about it, a pomp and prodigality of power, which mars its definiteness of tone, as well as its distinctness of outline. We look on its landscapes as through a summer haze, or through the silver of moonlight ; and thus its personages seem too remote and Ossianic. It abounds in magnificent passages ; and visions ninth and tenth—“Expiation” and “Retribution”—are replete with pathos and solemn beauty. The “Evening in Furness Abbey” is more chastened and severe, and is, throughout, perhaps the finest specimen of Professor Wilson’s blank verse, which has nothing of the ruggedness of Young, or the verbosity of Thomson, but breathes a music of its own—“a linked sweetness long drawn out”—which rivets the ear by its varying cadences ; tones of persuasive softness, now lively, like the breeze in the summer tree-tops—now mournful, like the far-off thunders of the waterfall. His aversion is the boisterous and the bustling, whether these are to be gleaned from themes high or low—from the modernising of chivalrous romaunts, or from the fables of classical mythology. His delight is in the poetry of still life,—the blind man sitting on the way-side stone—the effigies in a ruined abbey—the solitude of the midnight mountain-ridge—the waveless lake—the autumnal moonlight, with the hawk sleeping on the sepulchral cairn, among the hoary cannachs of the moor. He allows nothing sinful or sullyng to mar

“The radiance of his gifted soul,  
Where never mists or darkness roll ;

A poet's soul, that flows for ever,  
 Right onwards like a noble river,  
 Refulgent still, or by its native woods  
 Shaded, and running on thro' sunless solitudes.

In gazing on the picture of a patient "Ass in a snow-storm," a thousand bright and beautiful ideas awaken to his imagination, of patient suffering and endurance—of heroic fortitude in adversity, of serene faith amid the evils of life ; and, in describing the cottage of a pious and resigned old dame, we are characteristically told that

"The wreath that stole  
 From the rose-tree and jasmine clustering wide,  
 O'er all the dwelling's bloomy side,  
 Tells that whoe'er doth there abide  
 Must have a gentle soul.  
 Then gently breathe, and softly tread,  
 As if thy steps were o'er the dead !  
 Break not the slumber of the air  
 Even by the whisper of a prayer,  
 But, in the spirit, let there be  
 A silent Benedicite !

To Professor Wilson we owe the introduction into our literature of a style of criticism at once more philosophical and more genial—of a criticism which combines analytical subtlety and precision with amazing powers of imaginative illustration, and which renders his essays on Homer, on the Greek Anthology, on Spenser, on Milton, (yet in MS.,) on Wordsworth, on Scott, on Burns, on Moore's Byron, and on the English Satirists—all written in the same catholic spirit—among the finest things in our language. As a delineator of Scottish pastoral life—say rather of primitive life and manners, as contradistinguished from conventional or town life—his "Lights and Shadows," his "Trials of Margaret Lyndsay," and his "Foresters," seem destined to remain unapproached in their peculiar excellencies ; but, were it allowable to say so, that eloquence, which Hal-

lam has designated as "the rush of mighty waters," is nowhere to be found in such magnificent power as in the "Recreations of Christopher North," and in the Shakspearean "Noctes Ambrosianæ," and "Dies Boreales."

There are only two other poets, whose career links them with the termination of last century, that now remain to be noticed: these are James Montgomery and Thomas Campbell. The former arose like a beacon-light, and gradually blazed into a star; the other burst forth at once, like the sun from dawn, in all the effulgence of glory. They have this in common, however, that by each a middle course was adopted between the chaste severity of the classical model, and the licentious freedom of the romantic, which, under the mastery of Scott, afterwards became paramount.

No poet ever made a more brilliant *entrée* than Thomas Campbell did, in "The Pleasures of Hope," written at twenty-one. In fact, it was regarded as completely a marvel of genius, and at once deservedly placed its author among the immortals; for if language is capable of embalming thought, and that thought consists of pictures steeped in the richest hues of imagination, and of sentiments which, in their splendour and directness, may be regarded as "mottoes of the heart," the poem could not possibly ever be forgotten, provided the lines of any other writer were destined to be held in remembrance. With a daring hand the young poet essayed every string of the lyre, and they each responded in tones of sublimity, or of beauty and pathos. The poem was evidently the product of fine genius and intense labour; for nothing so uniformly fine, so sustained in excellence, was ever produced without intense labour; yet so exquisite is the art, that the words seem to have dropped into their places, and the melody, "like one sweetly played in tune," flows on apparently without effort—now wailing through the depths of tenderness, and now rising into

the cloud-lands of imagination with the roll of thunder. That traces of juvenility should have been here and there discernible in an effort otherwise so high and so sustained, is not to be wondered at ; but, even in these exuberances, genius and taste were ever predominant, while the diction, chaste and polished, was yet instinct with spirit. An energetic eloquence, which occasionally supplied the place of inspiration, and an art which could lead Beauty in flowery chains, without depriving her step of the air and the graces of Nature, made up for all other deficiencies.

When we look on "The Pleasures of Hope" as a work achieved while the author yet stood on the threshold of manhood, it is almost impossible to speak of it in terms of exaggerated praise ; and whether taking it in parts, or as a whole, I do not think I overrate its merits in preferring it to any didactic poem of equal length in the English language. No poet, at such an age, ever produced such an exquisite specimen of poetical mastery—that is, of fine conception and of high art combined ; but if time matures talent, and the faculties ought to strengthen by exercise, Campbell cannot be said to have redeemed the pledge given by this earliest of his efforts. How could he ? With the exception of a few redundancies of diction, he left himself little to improve on, either in matter or manner ; for sentiments tender, energetic, impassioned, eloquent, and majestic are conveyed to the reader in the tones of a music for ever varied—sinking or swelling like the harmonies of an *Æolian lyre*—yet ever delightful ; and these are illustrated by pictures from romance, history, or domestic life, replete with power and beauty. What could possibly excel, in pathos and natural truth, the mother's heart-yearnings over her cradled child ?—the episode of the Wanderer leaning over the gate by "the blossomed beanfield, and the sloping green," coveting the repose and comfort of the hamlet-home beside him !—the

allusion to the melancholy fortunes of the Suicide?—the parting of the Convict with his Daughter?—or in power, “The Descent of Brama?”—the apostrophe to the wrongs of Poland? and the allusion to the consummation of all things, with which the poem magnificently concludes? It is like a long fit of inspiration—a chequered melody of transcendent excellence, passage after passage presenting only an ever-varying and varied tissue of whatever is beautiful and sublime in the soul of man, and the aspects of nature. No ungraceful expressions, no trite observations, no hackneyed similes, no unnatural sentiments, no metaphysical scepticisms break in to mar the delightful reverie. The heart is lapped in Elysium, the rugged is softened down, and the repulsive hid from view; nature is mantled in the enchanting hues of the poet’s imagination, and life seems but a tender tale set to music.

From a poem in every one’s memory extracts were superfluous. If any composition could combine more energy of sentiment with versification as magnificent, it is to be found in the “Lochiel’s Warning” of the same author. From the mists and commingling shadows of the Highland mountains, he has singled out and conjured up two solitary figures, a chieftain and a sooth-sayer. The one—a man of this world, daring, determined, and a scoffer at danger, full of heroic ardour, devoted loyalty, and quenchless faith in the success of the desperate cause he resolves to support—is brought into picturesque approximation to, and contrast with, a being who, although on earth, yet seems not of it—who is wrapt up in visionary thoughts and shadowy abstractions—whose fevered fantasies overleap Nature’s boundaries, and who declares that

“Man cannot cover what God would reveal;  
 ’Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,  
 And coming events cast their shadows before.”

There is a mysterious solemnity in all he utters, as if his voice was only the response of an internal oracle, which overboils with tempestuous energy, and which has its utterance through him. His soul is illumined with the corruscations of prophetic light, by which he has glimpses into the gloom of that Futurity whose chambers shut and open before him. The resolution of the chieftain is, however, immovable

“ as the rock of the ocean that stems  
A thousand wild waves on the shore.”

Although not unaware that Doubt, Darkness, and Ruin encompass the perilous enterprise in which he is about irremediably to embark, he scorns the adverse omens of the seer, indignantly exclaiming—

“ Down, soothless insulter! I trust not the tale;  
For never shall Albyn a destiny meet,  
So black with dishonour, so foul with retreat;  
Tho' my perishing ranks should be strewed in their gore  
Like ocean-weeds heaped on the surf-beaten shore,  
Lochiel, untainted by flight or by chains,  
While the kindling of life in his bosom remains,  
Shall victor exult, or in death be laid low  
With his back to the field, and his feet to the foe;  
And leaving in battle no blot on his name,  
Look proudly to heaven from the deathbed of fame.”

Campbell has there concentrated, in a short poem, as much vigour of conception, grandeur of description, and originality of illustrative imagery as would, in ordinary hands, have been deemed adequate to replenish volumes. It is throughout sterling ore, thrice refined from all alloy in the furnace of taste.

Having achieved such a triumph as “The Pleasures of Hope,” and measuring himself by the high standard of that composition, it is not wonderful that Campbell

was chary about hazarding his acquired reputation, or that his after appearances were, like his own “angel visits,” not only “short, but far between.” Yet, from year to year, some stray lyric gem attested to the public the unabated fire of his genius, and led them on to expect with delight the meridian of a day which had been ushered in by a dawn so gloriously brilliant.

It was asserted by the late Lord Jeffrey, that the great writers of this age are in nothing more remarkable than the very fearlessness of their borrowing. We could point out a cento of brilliant things in Campbell—who forms certainly no exception to this general charge—for which he has been indebted to a discriminating taste and a retentive memory; but then, as with Coleridge, he has conjoined a distinctness, an originality, and a superiority of view quite his own, together with that polish which is the peculiar charm to all his writings. He might admire excellencies in others, and imitate what he admired; but, beyond that, Campbell had a distinct path of his own, along “a wild, unploughed, untrodden shore.” He possessed the invention of true genius; and sought for and owned no prototype in “Lochiel’s Warning,” in “Hohenlinden,” in “The Battle of the Baltic,” in “Reullura,” in “The Last Man,” or in “O’Connor’s Child,” the diamond of his casket of gems.

In this last-named poem Campbell opened up a vein of thought and imagery, to which nothing in our preceding literature has the remotest resemblance, excepting, perhaps, the lyrical tales of Crabbe—“The Hall of Justice,” and “Sir Eustace Grey.” The resemblance, however, if there be any, is very slight; and it is highly problematical if Campbell had them at all in his eye during the composition of this the most thoroughly inspired of all his writings.

“O’Connor’s Child” opens in a strain of deep but chastened melancholy; and the vague wildness of remote

tradition is blent with the refinement, peculiar only to modern times, in its imagery—

“ Placed in the foxglove and the moss,  
Behold a parted warrior’s cross !  
That is the spot, where evermore  
The lady, at her shieling door,  
Enjoys that, in communion sweet,  
The living and the dead can meet,  
For lo! to love-lorn fantasy,  
The hero of her heart is nigh ! ”

Before the scene opens, the catastrophe has been consummated. The lovely daughter of a noble house has been left to wander, in frenzied desolation, the historian of her own sad tale. For the love of Connocht Moran, “ her belted forester,” she had forsaken her palace-home to roam the wilds ; while the disgraced pride of ancestry urges on her infuriated brothers to seek her lover’s blood—and destruction thus comes like the simoom.

“ When all was hushed at eventide,  
I heard the baying of their beagle ;  
‘ Be hushed ! ’ my Connocht Moran cried,  
‘ ’Tis but the screaming of the eagle.’  
Alas ! ’twas not the eyrie’s sound,  
Their bloody bands had tracked us out.  
Up-listening starts our couchant hound—  
And hark ! again, that nearer shout  
Brings faster on the murderers.  
‘ Spare—spare him, Brazil, Desmond fierce ! ’  
In vain, no voice the adder charms ;  
Their weapons crossed my sheltering arms ;  
Another’s sword has laid him low,  
Another’s, and another’s,  
And every hand that dealt the blow,  
Ah me ! it was a brother’s :  
Yes ! when his moanings died away,  
Their iron hands had dug the clay,



And o'er his burial turf they trod—  
 And I beheld, oh God, oh God !  
 His life-blood oozing from the sod !”

Such poetry requires no comment. When “The Flower of Love,” shut up within the embattled turret of her ancestral castle, sees her brothers, armed for war, about to depart with the banner of her sires in the midst, she thus exclaims, in prophetic fury—

“Sooner guilt the ordeal brand  
 Shall grasp unhurt, than ye shall hold  
 The banner with victorious hand  
 Beneath a sister's curse unrolled.  
 Oh, stranger, by my country's loss,  
 And by my love, and by the cross,  
 I swear I never could have spoke  
 The curse, that sever'd Nature's yoke,  
 But that a spirit o'er me stood,  
 And fired me with the wrathful mood ;  
 And frenzy to my heart was given  
 To speak the malison of heaven.  
 They would have crossed themselves, all mute :  
 They would have prayed to burst the spell ;  
 But at the stamping of my foot  
 Each hand down powerless fell !  
 ‘ And go to Athunrie ! ’ I cried ;  
 ‘ High lift the banner of your pride !  
 But know that where its sheet unrolls,  
 The weight of blood is on your souls !  
 Go where the havoc of your kerne  
 Shall float as high as mountain fern !  
 Men shall no more your mansion know !  
 The nettles on your hearth shall grow !  
 Dead, as the green oblivious flood  
 That mantles by your walls, shall be  
 The glory of O'Connor's blood !  
 Away !—away to Athunrie !  
 Where downward, when the sun shall fall,  
 The raven's wing shall be your pall !

And not a vassal shall unlace  
 The vizor from your dying face !'  
 A bolt that overhung our dome,  
 Suspended till my curse was given,  
 Soon as it passed these lips of foam,  
 Pealed in the blood-red heaven."

The greatest effort of Campbell's genius, however, was his "Gertrude of Wyoming;" nor is it likely ever to be excelled in its own peculiar style of excellence. It is superior to "The Pleasures of Hope" in the only one thing in which that poem could be surpassed—purity of diction; while in pathos, and in imaginative power, it is no whit inferior. The beauties of Gertrude, however, are of that unobtrusive kind, that, for the most part, they must be sought for. Its imagery is so select as to afford only indices to trains of thought. It "touches a spring, and lo! what myriads rise!" If we add to this, that, as a story, Gertrude is particularly defective, the circumstances will be made palpable which have operated against the popularity of a composition so thoroughly exquisite. The versification of the poem is intricately elaborate, the diction fastidiously select, and the incidents, as I have just hinted, less brought out than left to be imagined; as, for instance, where, in one stanza, Henry Waldegrave is the infantine companion of Gertrude, and, in the next, we are told of his arrival from foreign travel, ere we are dimly apprised that he had ever set out from home. Weighed, however, with the real excellencies of the poem, these and other minor blemishes—as inaccuracies in natural history—are "mere spots in the sun," and are amply counterbalanced by the Elysian description of Wyoming, with which the poem opens—although its tone occasionally more than reminds us of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence," and its imagery of Wordsworth's "Ruth;"—the arrival of Outalissi, "the eagle of his tribe," with the white boy in his hand, "like morning brought by

night ;" the landscape surrounding the home of Albert, so like "the pleasant land of drowsy head ;" the loves of Henry and Gertrude, so touching in their sweet sincerity, and their rapturous walks amid the shadowy majesty of the primeval Pennsylvanian forests ; the gathering and picturesque grouping of the motley warriors on the fatal eve of battle ; the death of the patriarchal Albert, and the dying address of the daughter to her husband, so full of pathos and nature ; and the energetically sublime invocation of the Indian chief, with which the scenes close. Interspersed, there are also delineations of scenery which display the very highest powers, and that minute fidelity which indicates the fine and accurate observer. Campbell did not work like Wordsworth, or Crabbe, or Southey, by touches repeated and repeated, till the minims make up a whole, but by sweeping lines and bold master-strokes. The following few words, for instance, convey a whole and almost boundless prospect to the mind :—

" At evening Alleghany views,  
Through ridges burning in her western beam,  
Lake after lake interminably gleam."

The following single stanza is full of a similar majesty. It is a picture not only finely conceived, but faultlessly executed :—

" Anon some wilder portraiture he draws ;  
Of Nature's savage glories he would speak,—  
The loneliness of earth that overawes,  
When, resting by some tomb of old Cacique,  
The lama-driver on Peruvia's peak  
Nor living voice nor motion marks around,  
But storks that to the boundless forest shriek,  
Or wild-cane arch, high flung o'er gulf profound,  
That fluctuates when the storms of El Dorado sound."

Turn from the desolation, the vastness, and wildness

of this, to a delineation of morning in five lines. It has the freshness and beauty of Claude Lorraine :—

“The morning wreath had bound her hair,  
 While yet the wild-bee trod in spangling dew ;  
 While boatmen carolled to the fresh-blown air,  
 And woods a horizontal shadow threw,  
 And early fox appeared in momentary view.”

Of Campbell's highest lyrics it would be impossible to speak in terms of exaggerated praise ; and in them more especially he has succeeded in engrafting the fresh wildness of the romantic school on the polished elegance of the classic. Whether we regard originality of conception, artistic skill, brilliancy of execution, vividness of illustration, moral pathos, or that impassioned energy which makes description subservient to feeling and sentiment, it would be difficult, from the far-off days of Pindar and Tyrtaeus, down to those of Collins and Gray, to point to anything finer or grander, or, to use the phrase of Sir Philip Sidney, that more “rouses the heart like the sound of a trumpet,” than his “Mariners of England,” his “Battle of the Baltic,” his “Lines on Alexandria,” his “Hohenlinden,” and his “Lochiel's Warning ;” while, for mellow pathos, for picturesque touches of nature, for phrases of magical power, and words or single lines that, within themselves, concentrate landscapes, he has lent a charm all his own to “The Exile of Erin,” the “Lines in Argyleshire,” “The Soldier's Dream,” “The Turkish Lady,” “The Grave of a Suicide,” “The Last Man,” “Lord Ullin's Daughter,” “Glenara,” “Wild Flowers,” and “The Rainbow.”

Campbell, like Coleridge, left utterly unfulfilled the promise of his youth ; for he did few things worthy of his fame after “Gertrude,” and that was published when he was just thirty-two. His magnificent May had no corresponding September ; his “Theodorics”

and “Pilgrims of Glencoe” were the mere lees of his genius, and utterly unworthy—more especially the last—of his former self. Pity they ever saw the light; and better for him had it been—knowing he had done what he had—to have hung up his harp, and silently lingered out his life in a secure consciousness of poetic immortality.

Here are a few bright droppings from Campbell’s patriotic vein. The stanzas were written to commemorate Corunna, and the death-day of Moore.

“Pledge to the much-loved land that gave us birth !  
 Invincible, romantic Scotia’s shore !  
 Pledge to the memory of her parted worth !  
 And, first among the brave, remember Moore !

And be it deemed not wrong that name to give  
 In festive hours, which prompts the patriot’s sigh !  
 Who would not envy such as Moore to live ?  
 And died he not as heroes wish to die ?

Yes ! though too soon attaining glory’s goal,  
 To us his bright career too short was given ;  
 Yet in a mighty cause his phœnix soul  
 Rose on the flames of victory to heaven !

Peace to the mighty dead ! our bosom thanks  
 In sprightlier strains the living may inspire !  
 Joy to the chiefs that lead old Scotia’s ranks  
 Of Roman garb, and more than Roman fire.

Triumphant be the Thistle, still unfurled,  
 Dear symbol wild ! on freedom’s hills it grows,  
 Where Fingal stemmed the tyrants of the world,  
 And Roman eagles found unconquered foes !

Is there a son of generous England here,  
 Or fervid Erin ?—he with us shall join,  
 To pray that in eternal union dear,  
 The Rose, the Thistle, and the Shamrock twine !

Types of a race who shall the invader scorn,  
As rocks resist the billows round their shore—  
Types of a race who shall to time unborn  
Their country leave unconquered as of yore !”

The writings of Thomas Campbell are distinguished by their elegance and their perspicuousness, by their straightforward manliness and their high tone of moral sentiment. They abound with original imagery, with lofty aspirations after the true and beautiful, and with ideas that, from their prominent beauty, may be almost said to be tangible. Taste, however—the perfect equipoise of his fine faculties—was the source of that mastery which controlled and harmonised all. Hence he had concentration ; for his poetry was like a weeded garden, and every blossom that “dedicated its beauty to the sun” was placed in the situation most appropriate to its perfection. His nervous manliness never degenerated into coarseness ; and judgment ever pruned the wings of his imagination and fancy. His delicacy was free from affectation, and his enthusiasm never “o’erstepped the modesty of nature.” Even when impelled by the whirlwind of inspiration, the helm obeyed his hand, and the bark ploughed on, amid the roaring of the waves, towards the haven of her destination. Few poets combined, in an equal degree, such felicity of conception with such perfect handling—such vigour of thought with such delicacy of expression ; yet this delicacy was as free from mawkishness as his sentiment from metaphysical obscurity—the rock on which so many have foundered. He could not rest self-satisfied until he had placed each object in its fairest point of view—until he had harmonised all his separate materials with his general design. While in the selection of his topics he was fastidious, in his treatment of them he was alike daring and original—presenting us either with new and striking images, or with familiar ones unexpectedly placed in a novel aspect ; and whatever

these were, he laboured until he had imparted to them all the graces of thought and language. His usual success resulted from bold generalisations; but, when occasions offered, he descended to the minute with an elegance quite apart from tedious trifling. His genius is characterised by bursts of abrupt lyrical enthusiasm; it is like his own "Andes, giant of the western star," his "wolf's long howl from Oonalaska's shore," his "aye as if for death a lonely trumpet wailed," his panther "howling amid that wilderness of fire," his "storks that to the boundless forest shriek," his "pyramid of fire," his "death-song of an Indian chief." He took not to by-lanes, as many have done, for singularity's sake, when the fair broad highway was before him. He preferred the classical to the quaint, the obvious to the obscure; and the general sympathies of mankind to an "audience fit though few," which none, I presume, ever did, who could not help it. In the management of his subject he either grappled with it, as Hercules did with the Lernæan hydra; or tenderly blent all its elements into harmonious beauty, as if encircling it with the fabled cestus of Cytheræa.

Much of what has been just said regarding Thomas Campbell, applies also—although, perhaps, not with equal force—to James Montgomery; but their courses towards poetical eminence have been in the inverse to each other. At the time of life when the day-star of Campbell's genius, having past its early meridian, was already going down, Montgomery had scarcely signalled himself, and that only by unequal compositions, which he has since readily excelled. Coleridge and Campbell were thus at one: Montgomery, on the other hand, resembled Milton, Dryden, and Rogers, whose best poetry was that of their grey hairs.

"The Wanderer of Switzerland," Montgomery's earliest performance, could scarcely have attained its popularity, either from its subject, which is local, or its

treatment, which verges on common-place, or from its poetical merits, which are not of the rarest ; but along with it some fine lyrics were published, high-toned in sentiment and feeling, which bespoke the true touch, and found an echo in many hearts. "The West Indies," a poem written in commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade by the British legislature, was also an unequal although a much superior production ; and has a raciness of manner, a beauty of thought, and occasionally an indignant vehemence of expression about it, which, coupled with the nature of its subject, deservedly won for it a wide acceptance. Had it been the work of his later years, Montgomery would have assumed a higher and more exulting tone, and made it a jubilee hymn, instead of its being, what in its least inspired portions it is, an exposition, from local and historical sources, of the horrors of that abominable traffic rendered into elegant verse. What he has done, however, he has done well ; and its finest passages and apostrophes—as that on love of country—could only have been written by a genuine poet ; for it is but to a certain height in heaven that the vulture can maintain his semblance to the eagle. Somewhat loosely put together as it here and there is, it sparkles throughout with gems of thought, which are appropriately and beautifully set, yet lose little of their lustre when removed from their places, and shine by their own intrinsic light. It is a poem, however, rather of the feelings than of the fancy, and has too much to do with stern facts to be throughout delightful ; and in this respect is inferior to the other three larger works which succeeded it—"The World before the Flood," "Greenland," and "The Pelican Island"—the two former likewise in the heroic couplet, the last in a peculiar kind of blank verse, which has much less reference to that of Milton, Thomson, Cowper, or Wordsworth, than to our early dramatic writers, and with all their force, freedom, and ease ; in many parts



more resembling an improvisation than a composition.

Of these three last-mentioned performances, each may be said to be successively in advance of the other in development of poetical power and resources. In the first, the description of the antediluvian patriarchs in their valleys of bliss—the true Arcadia—allows him a free and full range for his pleasant fancies; and he luxuriates in describing the large happiness they enjoyed ere invaded by the giant descendants of Cain. Among its finer delineations are the innocent loves of Javan and Zillah, the translation of Enoch, and the death-scene of our first parent Adam. The prevailing fault of the poem is a monotony and languor arising from its length, and the deficiency in stirring incident—in short, from the preponderance of description over action; and this notwithstanding its being written throughout with great care, and studded over with passages of uncommon elegance and beauty.

“Greenland” is shorter, but perhaps still more highly finished. The subject being quite congenial to the taste, feelings, and genius of the author, is written *con amore*, and the composition is pervaded by a noble but subdued enthusiasm. The voyage of the Moravian missionaries to the inhospitable Arctic regions is finely described; and their appearance there, under the touches of his pen, is as if angels of light had been commissioned to walk for a season amid the darkness and desolation of the realms of frost and snow. But by far its finest section is that commemorative of the depopulation of the Norwegian colonies on the east coast of Greenland, and its final abandonment by Europeans, from the increasing inclemency of the winters about the beginning of the fifteenth century. Montgomery here rises above himself in passionate earnestness, and in force of description; and by that canto alone would have distinctly stamped himself a poet of original power.

Essaying a still loftier flight, the whole of his imaginative strength was garnered up to be put forth in "The Pelican Island;" nor was his attempt like that of Icarus. It must be placed at the head of his works, whether we regard it as a whole, or in insulated passages; for it exhibits a richer command of language, and its imagery is collected from a much more extended field of thought and research, than any of its predecessors. It is also more remarkable for careful artistic adaptation of its parts to the general design, while its situations are more varied in their aspects, its suggestions more original, and its speculations more bold and daring. Indeed, Montgomery repeatedly trenches on the sublime in several parts of "The Pelican Island;" as in his descriptions of the formation of the coral reefs, and of the aspect of the southern heaven, with its sparkling constellations, and its emblematic cross—unseen by European poets save in their dreams of the grand and beautiful.

"Night, silent, cool, transparent, crowned the day;  
 The sky receded farther into space,  
 The stars came lower down to meet the eye,  
 Till the whole hemisphere, alive with light,  
 Twinkled from east to west by one consent.  
 The constellations round the Arctic pole,  
 That never set to us, here scarcely rose,  
 But in their stead, Orion through the north  
 Pursued the Pleiads; Sirius, with his keen  
 Quick scintillations, in the zenith reigned.  
 The South unveiled its glories; there the Wolf,  
 With eyes of lightning, watch'd the Centaur's spear;  
 Through the clear hyaline, the Ship of Heaven  
 Came sailing from Eternity; the Dove,  
 On silver pinions, wing'd her peaceful way;  
 There, at the footstool of Jehovah's throne,  
 The Altar, kindled from his presence, blazed;  
 There, too, all else excelling, meekly shone

The Cross—the symbol of redeeming love.  
 The heavens declared the glory of the Lord,  
 The firmament displayed his handiwork."

Undeniable, however, as are the merits of Montgomery's longer and more ambitious works, and highly creditable as these are to his enterprise and achievement, it is as a lyrical poet that he has won his freshest laurels, and will be best remembered; for on these he has the most unreservedly shed the peculiar beauty of his genius. He is there himself, and can be confounded with no other: and few that have read can readily forget his pieces severally entitled "The Common Lot," "Night," "Prayer," "The Grave," "Aspirations of Youth," "Incognita," "Bolehill Trees," "Make Way for Liberty," "A Walk in Spring," and "The Alps, a Reverie." With the exceptions, perhaps, of Moore, Campbell, and Hemans, I doubt indeed if an equal number of the lyrics of any other modern poet have so completely found their way to the national heart, there to be enshrined in hallowed remembrance. Among the very finest of these are "Night" and "Prayer." I give the last:—

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
 Uttered or unexpressed;  
 The motion of a hidden fire  
 That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
 The falling of a tear;  
 The upward glancing of an eye,  
 When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
 That infant lips can try;  
 Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach  
 The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
 The Christian's native air ;  
 His watchword at the gates of death—  
 He enters heaven by prayer.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,  
 Returning from his ways ;  
 While angels in their songs rejoice  
 And say, ' Behold, he prays.'

The saints, in prayer, appear as one,  
 In word, and deed, and mind,  
 When with the Father and his Son,  
 Their fellowship they find.

Nor prayer is made on earth alone :  
 The Holy Spirit pleads ;  
 And Jesus, on the eternal throne,  
 For sinners intercedes.

Oh Thou ! by whom we come to God,  
 The life, the truth, the way ;  
 The path of prayer thyself hast trod—  
 Lord, teach us how to pray."

One great merit which may be claimed for James Montgomery is, that he has encroached on no man's property as a poet ; he has staked off a portion of the great common of literature for himself, and cultivated it according to his own taste and fancy. In his appropriated garden, you find herbs and sweet-smelling flowers—the rosemary, and the thyme, and the marjoram—the lily, the pink, and the pansy—the musk-rose and the gilly-flower ; but you have no staring sunflowers, no Brobdignag hollyhocks, no flaunting dahlias—for he clings to a simplicity that disdains ostentatious ornament ; and thus many are apt to think

the stream of his inspiration shallow, simply because it is pellucid. It is not easy to characterise his poetry, so as to convey any adequate idea of its excellencies—except by saying, in negatives, that it shuns all glare, glitter, and eccentricity ; and that it cannot be expected to find admirers among those who bow down at the shrines of exaggeration or false taste.

Some have asserted—truly most idly—that the fame of Montgomery was founded on, and has been supported by, his sectarianism. If so, the Moravians are a much more potent body than they are generally accredited to be. However the applause of a class may have originally given an impetus to his popularity, from the very first, as his works attest—and they are full of faith, hope, and charity—he wrote not for a section, but for mankind ; and well has Professor Wilson remarked, in reference to this very topic, that “had Mr Montgomery not been a true poet, all the religious magazines in the world would not have saved his name from forgetfulness and oblivion. He might have flaunted his day like the melancholy poppy—melancholy in all its ill-scented gaudiness ; but, as it is, he is like the rose of Sharon, whose balm and beauty shall not wither, planted on the banks of ‘that river whose streams make glad the city of the Lord.’”

One word, in conclusion, regarding religious poetry—against which there have been some able and conscientious objectors. Nor have their reasons been quite groundless.

The most sublime poetry, by far, to which the world has ever listened, is that of the Hebrew. It is immeasurably beyond all Greek and all Roman inspiration ; and yet its sole theme is the Great Jehovah, and the ways and wonders of His creation. All is simply grand, nakedly sublime ; and man before his Maker, even in the act of adoration, is there made to put his lips in the dust. So have done the great bards of succeeding times

—Milton, and Young, and Thomson, and Cowper, and Pollok. In approaching the shrine they take off the sandals from their feet, well knowing that the spot whereon they stand is holy ground. But all not being great, alas ! all do not so behave ; and hence, in common hands, sacred poetry has become, not without reason, a subject of doubt and discussion ; for in them error has dared to counsel infallibility—ignorance to fathom Omniscience—and narrow-minded prejudice to circumscribe the bounds of mercy—the human irreverently to approach the Divine—and “fools to rush in where angels fear to tread.”

Genius, therefore, is not to be regarded by the gifted as a toy. It is a dread thing. It is like a sharp two-edged sword placed in the hands of its possessor, for much of good or of evil ; and the results are exactly as it is wielded, whether to the right hand or to the left. To claim exclusive moral—say rather immoral—privileges for men of genius, as men of genius, is absurd. They ask none, they need none. Eccentricity and error may be coupled with genius, but do not necessarily arise from it—as Shakspeare, Milton, and Scott have lived to illustrate. They spring from quite another source, for they are found a thousand times oftener without such companionship than with it, and verify the epigram of Prior—

“ Yes ! every poet is a fool,  
 By demonstration Ned can show it :  
 Happy could Ned’s inverted rule  
 Prove every fool to be a poet.”

Not only should the man of genius be measured by a high standard, but exactly in proportion to the extent and elevation of his powers is he doubly or triply accountable. We may rest assured that there is no discrepancy between the great and the good, for that would be quite an anomaly in the Creator’s government of the

universe. Only the silly and the shallow, the poetaster, the pretender, and the unprincipled, will seek to skulk behind such a transparent bulwark. Almost all the great poets of ancient and modern times (a few rare exceptions only go to strengthen the rule) have been men who revered Heaven and respected themselves, nobly fulfilling their destinies: those—in the pleasant valleys opening up innocent fountains of ever-new delight, for solacing the depressed, and refreshing the weary: these—labouring through the defiles of the difficult mountains for flowers of beauty and gems of price, unselfishly and unreservedly to be at once thrown into the general treasury-store of humanity.

## LECTURE IV.

The succession of Lord Byron to the poetical supremacy.—The energy of his genius, and its different phases.—Childe Harold, Turkish and other Tales.—His Pantheistic views.—Extracts from *Prisoner of Chillon*; from *Giaour*; from *Bride of Abydos*; from *Parasina*; and from *Beppo*.—Verses to *Mary*.—Byron and Burns.—Bishop Heber, Palestine and Hymns.—Dean Milman, Dramatic Poems, and Samor.—*Elegiac Verses*.—Dr Croly, Paris, Sebastian, Gems from Antique.—Honourable W. Herbert, Icelandic Translations, Helga, and Attila; specimen, *Northern Spring*. William Tennant, Anster Fair and other poems: extract, *Maggy Lauder*.—Frere's Whistlecraft; specimen.—Barham and Hood.—*Domestic Tragedy* from Ingoldsby Legends.—Theodore Hook, his amazing powers of improvisation.—James and Horace Smith, Rejected Addresses.—Thomas Moore.—Anacreon, Odes and Epistles, Satires, Lalla Rookh, Loves of Angels, Irish Melodies.—*Lines at Cohos*.—*The Young May Moon*.—Burns and Moore.—Man not cosmopolite; national poetry.

UP to the time at which this Lecture commences, the writings of Wordsworth had been more talked about than read; the fame of Coleridge was limited to a small circle of affectionate admirers; the star of Campbell was still in the ascendant—the cynosure of eyes with the select; Crabbe was quietly but industriously cultivating his own homely peculiar field; while the tide of popularity flowed triumphantly along with Scott, whose fresh free song all the aspiring young bards imitated, like a forest of mocking-birds. Open their tomes where you listed, let it have been at page one, or page one hundred, there were nothing but moss-trooper and marauder—baron bold and gay ladye—hound in leash and hawk



in hood—bastion huge and grey chapelle—henchmen and servitors—slashed sleeves and Spanish boots—steel-barred aventayles and nodding morions—“guns, trumpets, blunderbusses, drums, and thunder.” The chivalrous epics of Scott are indeed glorious things—full of vivacity, energy, variety, and nature—and will endure while a monument of human genius remains; but their thousand and one imitations have vanished—as I have before mentioned—like the clouds of yesterday. When the mighty master himself, instead of satiating the public, took to another field, that of prose, and left poetry to younger men, arose the Oriental dynasty, under the prime-viziership of Lord Byron; and down went William of Deloraine, and Wat of Buccleuch, before Hassan and Selim, Conrad and Medora, the Jereed men and the Janissaries, and all the white-turbaned, wide-trousered, hyacinthine-tressed, pearl-cinctured, gazelle-eyed, opium-chewing, loving and hating sons and daughters of Mahomet. Every puny rhymester called the moon “Phingari,” daggers “Ataghans,” drummers “Tambourgis,” tobacco-pipes “Chibouques,” and women “Houris.” It was up with the crescent and down with the cross; and, in as far as scribbling at least went, every poet was a detester of port and pork, and a renegade from all things Christian. Nay, even something like the personal appearance of Childe Harold was aspired at; and each beardless bardling, whether baker’s, butcher’s, or barber’s apprentice, had his hair cut and his shirt-collar turned down *à la Byron*. Midshipmen perseveringly strove to look Conrad-like and misanthropic; lawyers’ clerks affected the most melancholious mood; and half-pay ensigns, contemptuous of county police or the public safety,—

—“with the left heel insidiously aside,  
Provoked the caper that they seemed to chide:”

and on hacks, hired by the hour, adventured imitations of Mazeppa at a hand-gallop along the king’s highway.

The premature appearance of George Gordon, Lord Byron, a minor, and his crushing by Lord Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review*, are matters too well known to need anything here beyond mere allusion ; and the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," his satire in "retort courteous," may be passed over—vigorous and venomous as it was—in an equally summary manner. Even in the early volume, however, mixed up with much crudeness and juvenility, there were undoubted sparkles of that genius which afterwards astonished the world ; and in the maturer satire—rash, presumptuous, and ill-judged as it was—indications of an ardent temperament and masculine intellect. But these glimpses were heliacal : the true morning of Byron's genius manifested itself in "Childe Harold,"—a work of transcendent power and beauty, rich in its descriptions, passionate in its tones, majestic in its aspirings, sublime in its very doubts—which at once stamped his reputation as a great and prevailing poet. Its effect was electric—its success was instantaneously recognised. The star of his popularity shot with a burst to the zenith ; and, as he himself expresses it, "I got up one fine morning, and found myself famous."

The poetry of Byron may be divided into three great sections ; each pretty distinctly different from the other, in regard alike to subject and to manner. The first, commencing with the opening cantos of "Childe Harold," includes "The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," "The Corsair," "Lara," the lyrics to "Thyrza," and some minor pieces. The second comprehends "The Siege of Corinth" and "Parisina," "Mazeppa," the concluding cantos of "Childe Harold," "The Prisoner of Chillon," "The Lament of Tasso," and "Manfred." The third, starting with "Beppo," and comparatively dosing or prosing through the tragedies and mysteries, characteristically terminated with "Don Juan." Sad that it should have been so—but "what is writ is writ."

In all the works of the first section, we have the history of an individual mind, as regarded in different phases ;—for Harold, the Giaour, Selim, Conrad, and Lara, are all and each the same person, placed in some novel and romantic situation. Nor widely different is the renegade Alp, or the reckless Mazeppa, or the guilty Hugo. But the compositions in which the three last-named characters occur, indicate a transition state between those before mentioned and those which were to follow. Up to this period all the works of Lord Byron were characterised by passionate energy, by indomitable self-will, by point and antithesis—by emphatic sarcasm, and by brief but beautiful descriptive touches of men and nature. With much quite his own, we had much to remind us of Burns, of Scott, and of Crabbe ; occasionally also of Campbell, but certainly nothing—not a vestige—of the Lake School. The composition of the third canto of “Childe Harold,” and of “The Prisoner of Chillon,” however, opened up a new era in his mental history,—evidently brought about by the writings of Wordsworth, Wilson, and Coleridge. He began to substitute contemplation for action, and the softer affections of humanity for its sterner and darker passions. We had now a keener sensibility to the charms of nature—a love of stars and flowers, and lakes and mountains ; and descriptions which were formerly dashed off in general outline, were now filled up with elaboration, and graced with all the minuteness of picturesque detail. Take, as an example of this contrast in matter and manner, a stanza from the first, and then another from the third canto of the Childe.

“Childe Harold had a mother—not forgot,  
Though parting from that mother he did shun ;  
A sister whom he loved—but saw her not  
Before his weary pilgrimage begun.  
If friends he had, he bade adieu to none ;  
Yet deem not thence his breast a breast of steel :

They who have known what 'tis to doat upon  
 A few dear objects, will in sadness feel  
 Such partings break the heart they fondly hope to heal."

This is the language of passion, and blighted affection, and baffled hope, looking not for, nay disdaining, that consolation which the other afterwards finds in the contemplation of the majestic and beautiful in the material world.

"Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends ;  
 Where rolled the ocean, thereon was his home ;  
 Where a blue sky and glowing clime extends,  
 He had the passion and the power to roam ;  
 The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam,  
 Were unto him companionship ; they spake  
 A mutual language clearer than the tone  
 Of his land's tongue, which he would oft forsake  
 For Nature's pages glassed by sunbeams on the lake."

It is here, and elsewhere, that we observe the brooding influence of the pantheism of Wordsworth—the poet seeming to feel his existence less as an individual of a particular species, than as a portion of an eternal spirit, animating and pervading all things within the dominion of nature.

"I live not in myself, but I become  
 Portion of that around me ; and to me  
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum  
 Of human cities torture : I can see  
 Nothing to loathe in nature save to be  
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,  
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain  
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

And thus I am absorbed, and this is life :  
 I look upon the peopled desert past,  
 As on a place of agony and strife,  
 Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,

To act and suffer, but remount at last  
 With a fresh pinion ; which I feel to spring,  
 Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast  
 Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,  
 Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling.

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part  
 Of me, and of my soul, as I of them ?  
 Is not the love of these deep in my heart  
 With a pure passion ? Should I not contemn  
 All objects if compared with these ? and stem  
 A tide of suffering, rather than forego  
 Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm  
 Of those whose eyes are only turned below,  
 Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow ?”

Well has Solomon said, “ There is nothing new under the sun ;” and if there be anything intelligible in the quasi-new nebulous psychology of Emerson different from what is contained in these stanzas, pray what is it—or in where does it consist ? and “ Echo answers—where !”

Take another example in the solitude of the Giaour, as opposed to that of the Prisoner of Chillon : the one all anguish and despair, and over-boiling passion—the hyena dashing itself against the bars of its cage ; the other all heavenly benevolence, holy resignation, and tranquil regret. The Giaour is one “ whose heart may break, but cannot bend :” his elements are fire and air alone. He spurns sympathy, and will not be comforted. Having lost what he alone prized, he looks on all else as worthless : he is swallowed up in a gloomy and engrossing selfishness. Not so the Prisoner. He turns from his own sorrows to sympathise with and console his brethren. He indulges in no demoniacal ravings—the thought of revenge never enters his gentle heart. Feeding on bitter fruits, he accuses not fate ; and chastens down his spirit to drink without murmuring the cup of bitterness, while all the lights of life are, one

by one, being successively extinguished around him. The milk of his nature turns not to gall—his faith forbids it; and even the stones of his dungeon come to be looked upon by him with the regard due to "familiar faces." So, when his chain is broken, so far is it from the love of Nature having been extinguished in his heart, that, with rapturous delight, he scrambles up to the barred lattice—

"To bend upon the mountains high  
The quiet of a loving eye.

I saw them, and they were the same,  
They were not changed like me in frame;  
I saw their thousand years of snow  
On high—their wide long lake below,  
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow:  
I heard the torrents leap and gush  
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;  
I saw the white-walled distant town,  
And whiter sails go shimmering down;  
And then there was a little isle,  
Which in my very face did smile,  
The only one in view.  
A small green isle—it seemed no more,  
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor;  
But in it there were three tall trees,  
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,  
And by it there were waters flowing,  
And on it there were young flowers growing,  
Of gentle breath and hue:  
The fish swam by the castle wall,  
And they seemed joyous each and all;  
The eagle rode the rising blast,  
Methought he never flew so fast  
As then to me he seemed to fly."

We have no trace here of Spenser and Thomson, of Dryden and Crabbe, of Scott and Campbell, as in Byron's earlier productions. "The Prisoner of Chillon"

is constructed throughout on the principles of Wordsworth, and seems intended to show, by its purity, its pathos, and calm beauty, how consonant these are with the finest purposes of poetry, when freed from the puerilities, the verbose diffuseness, and the mean prolixity of detail, which so frequently mar their effect, even in the hands of their great promulgator. Let me now take a rapid glance at the Tales on which, after the publication of the opening cantos of “Childe Harold,” the fame of Lord Byron was principally grounded—“The Giaour,” “The Bride of Abydos,” “The Corsair,” and “Lara.”

The soliloquising of the Giaour is in the same tone of baffled, and with even a bitterer spirit of misanthropy than the Childe himself, who, in his milder moods, is only a melancholy moraliser. He is like a caged eagle, the very oracle of impassioned wretchedness. His baffled and blighted love does not die away with the loss of its object, but continues to blaze and burn on with the fierceness and fervour of a volcano. The memory of the past throws forward fiery shadows on the dark sky of the future. He has glutted his revenge on his foes; he has sought and taken retribution in blood for blood, and has withdrawn to the shades of the cloister, not in humility of heart, but to live on “with naught to love or hate,” an idler among the living—breathing the air that has “a vitality of poison,” and looking listlessly on the day, whose sunshine brings no cheerfulness. To him all is a wild mockery, mere “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Earth holds nothing like that which he has lost, “or if it doth, in vain for him.” The holy calm and the religious feeling around him have no influence. Despising sympathy, he keeps aloof from all; and it is not till his hair turns grey, and his strength fails, and the shadows of welcome death are hovering over him, that, to the Friar who vainly endeavours to console and soothe him, he pours out the long pent-up

lava-torrent of his sufferings, "in thoughts that breathe and words that burn."

"Think me not thankless—but this grief  
Looks not to priesthood for relief;  
My soul's estate in secret guess,  
But wouldst thou pity more, say less.  
When thou canst bid my Leila live,  
Then will I sue thee to forgive;  
Then plead my cause in that high place,  
Where proffered masses purchase grace.—  
Go where the hunter's hand hath wrung  
From forest cave her shrieking young,  
And calm the lonely lioness;  
But soothe not, mock not my distress!  
Waste not thine orison: Despair  
Is mightier than thy pious prayer;  
I would not, if I might, be blest—  
I want no paradise, but rest."

Selim, in "The Bride of Abydos," is merely the Giaour under less exciting circumstances—circumstances that subdued him to despair; like day-beams breaking in on a captive in his dungeon only to show him that escape from it is impossible. The whole tale is one of gentle affection and chastened beauty. An intellectual sweetness pervades it, and even tones down the bloody catastrophe by which it is wound up. Nothing can be more dramatically fine than the garden scene—a scene that indelibly impresses itself on the heart and fancy. Nature seems to exult in the very luxury of her beauty; yet a mysterious awe broods over all, and we feel that the lovers are then and there met together for the last time. Selim tells Zuleika of his fears:—

"But ere her lip, or even her eye,  
Essayed to speak or look reply,  
Beneath the garden's wicket porch  
Far flashed on high a blazing torch!  
Another—and another—and another—



Far, wide, through every thicket spread,  
 The fearful lights are gleaming red ;  
 Nor these alone—for each right hand  
 Is ready with a sheathless brand.”

With a hasty embrace they part for ever ;

“ One bound he made, and gained the sand :  
 Already at his feet hath sunk  
 The foremost of the prying band,  
 A gaping head, a quivering trunk ;  
 Another falls, but round him close  
 A swarming circle of his foes ;  
 From right to left his path he cleft,  
 And almost met the meeting wave ;  
 His boat appears not five oars’ length—  
 His comrades strain with desperate strength—  
 Oh, are they yet in time to save ?  
 His feet the foremost breakers lave ;  
 His band are plunging in the bay,  
 Their sabres glitter through the spray ;  
 Wet, wild, unwearied in the strand  
 They struggle—now they touch the land !  
 They come—’tis but to add to slaughter—  
 His heart’s best blood is on the water.”

Such is the rapid energy of Byron’s narrative action ;  
 now for his wild, solemn, yet passionate sentiment :—

“ By Helle’s stream there is a voice of wail !  
 And woman’s eye is wet, man’s cheek is pale :  
 Zuleika ! last of Giaffir’s race !  
 Thy destined lord is come too late ;  
 He sees not—ne’er shall see thy face !  
 Can he not hear  
 The loud Wul-wulleh warn his distant ear ?  
 Thy handmaids weeping at the gate,  
 The Koran chanters of the hymn of fate !  
 Sighs in the hall, and shrieks upon the gale,  
 Tell him thy tale !

Thou didst not view thy Selim fall!  
 That fearful moment when he left the cave  
     Thy heart grew chill:  
 He was thy hope—thy joy—thy love—thine all!  
 And that last thought of him thou couldst not save  
     Sufficed to kill;  
 Burst forth in one wild cry—and all was still.  
 Peace to thy broken heart and virgin grave!"

The idea of the bird coming at even-tide, and singing above the tomb of Zuleika, is conceived in a fine tone of poetical feeling; as is also that of the white rose springing up from her virgin ashes.

Conrad "the Corsair" is only "the Giaour" exhibited in the bustle of agitated existence. His portrait, however, is not drawn, like that of the other, in bold, rapid master-strokes, but is brought out by elaborate and diligent re-touching. He is delineated physically and morally; and although we are told that he is a man with but "one virtue and a thousand crimes," we know him only as a proud, sullen, unhappy, and impassioned being—miserable in all save his love. Medora is one of Byron's most exquisite personifications of female character—worthy to stand in the same class with the Desdemona, Ophelia, and Imogene of Shakspeare, and the Belvidera of Otway. The parting scene with her husband, and that which brings him back a widower to his silent home, are among the most touchingly pathological ever conceived in a poet's heart.

"Lara" exhibits the same strength of conception, and the same beauty of execution; but its hues are less varied and more sombre, and its general aspect uninviting. The finest passage in the poem is the death-scene of the hero. In "the dark page" we recognise Gulnare, but in our remembrance of Medora, can scarcely sympathise with her devotedness.

In all these Tales passion and intellectual energy are invariably brought into the foreground; and description

is made subservient to them. A change became perceptible in “The Siege of Corinth” and “Parisina;” and in the former we have not only the glowing morning scene, when the march of the invading army commences, which is all activity and commotion, but the glorious moonlight one, in which Alp and Francesca meet to part for ever—the one to die of a broken heart, and the other to perish in his apostasy.

“There is a light cloud by the moon—  
 ’Tis passing, and will pass full soon—  
 If by the time its vapoury sail  
 Hath ceased her shaded orb to veil,  
 Thy heart within thee is not changed,  
 Then God and man are both avenged;  
 Dark will thy doom be, darker still  
 Thine immortality of ill.”

We have the same newly-developed descriptive power in the opening lines of *Parisina*, which picture twilight, and in the sketch of the glowing summer west, when her paramour suffered death.

“It is a lovely hour as yet  
 Before the summer sun shall set,  
 Which rose upon that heavy day,  
 And mocked it with his steadiest ray;  
 And his evening beams are shed  
 Full on Hugo’s fated head,  
 As his last confession pouring  
 To the monk—his doom deploring  
 In penitential holiness,  
 He bends to hear his accent bless  
 With absolution, such as may  
 Wipe our mortal stains away.  
 That high sun on his head did glisten  
 As he there did bow and listen;  
 And the rings of chestnut hair  
 Curled half down his neck so bare;

But brighter still the beam was thrown  
 Upon the axe that near him shone  
 With a clear and ghastly glitter—  
 Oh ! that parting hour was bitter !  
 Even the stern stood chilled with awe.  
 Dark the crime, and just the law—  
 Yet they shuddered as they saw."

It is to be remarked, also, that in both of the poems last mentioned there is a freedom and a fearlessness of portraiture—a kind of recklessness even communicating itself to the rhymes—a disdain, as it were, of all preparation for appearing at a public tribunal, which were not apparent in Byron's former attempts; combined with something like a conscious mastery—a confidence in commanding success. The same remarks apply to "Mazeppa," with its *nonchalant* opening and ending—the card-playing scene being as quaint as if penned by Quarles or Cowley; while the monarch sleeping over his Hetman's adventures has a dash of the mock heroic. The whole poetry of the composition centres in the flight across the boundless steppes, with its exquisite episode of the wolves and ravens.

"In "The Lament of Tasso" we have a gradual veering round to the Wordsworthian style and principles; but the conversion was not complete until exhibited in the third canto of the "Childe," and in "The Prisoner of Chillon," which appeared nearly simultaneously. In these we have a complete secession from the misanthropic to the pantheistic feeling; and an intense love of external nature is mingled with a gentler spirit of humanity.

The magnificent drama of "Manfred" is formed of the same elements, thrown into new and even more striking combinations; indeed, it contains more true poetry than all his other dramas put together. At an earlier stage of Byron's career, Manfred would have been only another Lara, or Alp, or Harold; for, like

them, “he has no sympathy with breathing flesh ;” but he has such an intense, passionate, ever-craving love for the majesty and beauty of nature, that, to gain communion with the *spirits* of the elements, he ventures to give up his own. To any who have a lingering doubt of the depth or delicacy of Byron’s genius, I have only to crave a reference to the scenes on the summit of the Jungfrau, beside the cataract of the Alps, and in the interior of the tower, when the moonlight on the snow-shining mountains recalls the memory of the Coliseum—

“ — till the place  
 Became religion, and the heart ran o’er  
 With silent worship of the great of old !”

Byron, like Burns, was a prodigy of genius ; nor were they at all dissimilar in temperament, although the peer, even from early boyhood, was much more than the other the spoiled child of circumstances. In this respect he approaches nearer to Alfieri and Rousseau, both of whom, in some strong features, he resembles—in much, certainly, of their wayward daring—their tendency to self-anatomy—and, I fear also, in much of their reckless perversion or disregard of moral principle, as occasions required. In “Don Juan” he seemed to consider himself “a chartered libertine,” free to speak out on all subjects unreservedly, heedless of praise or blame—nay, contemptuously disdainful of consequences. Sad that this should have been so ; for that extraordinary poem is bright with some of the richest gems of his genius—as the shipwreck in the second canto—the Greek feast in the third—the death of Haidée in the fourth—and the magnificent stanzas on “The Isles of Greece.” Putting morality aside, the return-home scene in “Beppo” is also quite inimitable for its commixture of light-hearted wit and effervescent frivolity. The parties are a Venetian, who has unexpectedly

turned up after having been long among the Moslem, and his lady, who, in wild and solitary despair, has, for consolation, taken to herself another partner :—

“ They entered, and for coffee called—it came,  
 A beverage for Turks and Christians both,  
 Although the way they make it's not the same.  
 Now Laura, much recovered, or less loth  
 To speak, cries ‘ Beppo ! what's your Pagan name ?  
 Bless me ! your beard is of amazing growth !  
 And how came you to keep away so long ?  
 Are you not sensible 'twas very wrong ?

And are you really, truly, now a Turk ?

Is it true they use their fingers for a fork ?

Well—that's the prettiest shawl, as I'm alive !  
 You'll give it me ? They say you eat no pork,  
 And how so many years did you contrive  
 To—bless me ! did I ever ? No ! I never  
 Saw a man grown so yellow ! how's your liver ?

Beppo ! that beard of yours becomes you not ;  
 It shall be shaved before you're a day older :

Why do you wear it ? Oh ! I had forgot—

Pray, don't you think the weather here is colder ?

How do I look ? You shan't stir from this spot

In that queer dress, for fear that some beholder

Should find you out, and make the story known.

How short your hair is ! Lack ! how grey it's grown !”

How different is this, in tone and spirit, from his early verses “ To Mary,” on paying her a visit after that marriage with another which, I cannot help thinking, was the star of wormwood that embittered all the after-thoughts of Byron's young heart, blighted its most deeply-rooted hopes of happiness, and left him bankrupt of bliss in life—“ a reckless roué.” The following stanzas seem the very wringings-out of the agony of affection :—

“Well ! thou art happy, and I feel  
 That I should thus be happy too ;  
 For still my heart regards thy weal  
 Warmly, as it was wont to do.

Thy husband’s blest, and ’twill impart  
 Some pangs to view his happier lot ;  
 But let them pass !—oh ! how my heart  
 Would hate him if he loved thee not !

When late I saw thy favourite child,  
 I thought my jealous heart would break ;  
 But when the unconscious infant smiled,  
 I kissed it for its mother’s sake.

I kissed it, and repressed my sighs,  
 Its father in its face to see ;  
 But then it had its mother’s eyes,  
 And they were all to love and me.

Mary, adieu ! I must away :  
 While thou art blest I’ll not repine ;  
 But near thee I can never stay ;  
 My heart would soon again be thine.

I deemed that time, I deemed that pride  
 Had quenched at length my boyish flame ;  
 Nor knew, till seated by thy side,  
 My heart in all, save hope, the same.

Yet was I calm ; I knew the time  
 My breast would thrill before thy look ;  
 But now to tremble were a crime !  
 We met, and not a nerve was shook.

I saw thee gaze upon my face,  
 Yet meet with no confusion there ;  
 One only feeling couldst thou trace—  
 The sullen calmness of despair.

Away ! away ! my early dream  
 Remembrance never must awake :  
 Oh ! where is Lethe's fabled stream—  
 My foolish heart, be still, or break !”

It is somewhat remarkable that the two most impassioned poets of modern times—Robert Burns and Lord Byron—should each have died at the early age of thirty-seven—as if the blade of such temperaments soon wore through the scabbard. Although so far dissociated by place in society, their fates and fortunes, as I have hinted, had many common points of resemblance. In the zenith of his dazzling reputation, Byron could not help exclaiming, “I have not loved the world, nor the world me ;” and Burns, doomed to a destiny so irreconcilable with his feelings and aspirations, must have often felt, like Southey's Thalaba, that he indeed was—

“ A lonely being, far from all he loved !”

Light lie the earth on these two glorious human creatures ; and let every cloud perish and pass away from their immortal memories !

We now turn to one who may more particularly be regarded in the light of a sacred poet, and whose life was a beautiful commentary on his writings. The career of Reginald Heber commenced considerably earlier than that of several others whose productions I have already alluded to. His poem entitled “ Palestine”—an extraordinary effort for one so young, whether we regard its striking imagery, its high-toned sentiment, or its elegant versification—carried off an Oxford prize in 1802 ; and, fine as some of these prize poems have unquestionably been, more especially Porteous's “ Death,” Glynn's “ Day of Judgment,” Grant's “ Restoration of Learning,” and Wrangham's “ Holy Land,” still it is doubtful whether Heber has been equalled either by any preceding or succeeding competitor. It is admirably sustained throughout ; and indeed the passages relating to the building of



the Temple, and to the scenes on Calvary, pass from the magnificent almost into the sublime. His second appearance, "Europe, or Lines on the Present War," in 1809, although more vigorous and elaborate, wants the freshness and the salient points of his earlier one; and although not derogatory to, did not enhance his reputation. These, together with a fine fragment, "The Passage of the Red Sea," some free translations from Pindar, and a few miscellaneous verses, were collected together in a volume, published in 1812.

While incumbent of Hodnet in Shropshire, Heber had an opportunity of affording the world an illustrious example of the highest intellectual culture, and the finest natural taste, being made perfectly compatible with the most faithful discharge of the humblest religious and moral duties—the instruction of the ignorant, the reproof of the erring, the visitation of the sick, and the consolation of the bereaved; and, in his leisure moments, he there also took delight in pouring out his feelings in snatches of sacred verse. In after years, the associations connected with home-scenes gave these compositions somewhat of a greater value in his own eyes; and, when Bishop of Calcutta, he took a pleasure in revising and collecting them; but they were not presented to the public until after his premature and lamented death in 1826. These "Hymns" have been by far the most popular of his productions, and deservedly so; for in purity and elevation of sentiment, in simple pathos, and in eloquent earnestness, it would be difficult to find anything superior to them in the range of sacred lyric poetry. They have the home-truth of Watts, but rank much higher, as literary compositions, than the "Moral and Divine Songs" of that great benefactor of youth; and all the devotion of Wesley or Keble, without their languor and diffuse verbosity. Heber always writes like a Christian scholar, and never finds it necessary to lower his tone on account of his

subjects. He is ever characterised by fine sensibilities ; by pure natural taste, highly cultivated ; and by a deep sense of the majestic and beautiful. Probably, too, from being extensively acquainted with what had been achieved by the great preceding poets, both of ancient and modern times, he did not venture to think that he could now startle the world by bold attempts at originality ; but what he did he determined to do well. Several copies of verses, which appeared posthumously in his "Journals," have all the freshness of his earlier compositions, with increased freedom of expression—giving us reason to believe that even greater things might have been expected from him. As it is, the sweet music of his "Thou art gone to the Grave," of his "Lo ! the Lilies of the Field," of his "From Greenland's icy Mountains," and of his "Brightest and best of the Sons of the Morning," will doubtless touch the hearts of many future generations, as it has done the present.

How calmly, sweetly solemn is the last-mentioned hymn !—

"Brightest and best of the sons of the morning !

Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid ;  
 Star of the East ! the horizon adorning,  
 Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid !

Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining ;  
 Low lies his head with the beasts of the stall ;  
 Angels adore him in slumber reclining—  
 Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all !

Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,  
 Odours of Edom, and offerings divine ?  
 Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean ?  
 Myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine ?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation—  
 Vainly with gifts would his favour secure ;  
 Richer by far is the heart's adoration ;  
 Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning !  
Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid ;  
Star of the East ! the horizon adorning,  
Lead where the infant Redeemer is laid !”

In turning from Bishop Heber to Henry Hart Milman, Canon of Westminster, perhaps something of the same remarks regarding the chilling influence of scholastic training may be found to hold true. The muse of Milton soared aloft without being seemingly encumbered by its Atlantean burthen of learning—nay, turned, as occasion required, its various stores to present and happy account ; but this was only a proof of its vast native energy and vigour—a roc amid the birds of the air ; for, when “knowledge was at one entrance quite shut out,” all the aspects of nature seemed to keep ever revolving before his mental eye in serene beauty and majesty. Milman’s taste and imagination, on the contrary, do not appear to have ever been allowed free scope ; and that his intellect was too early put into harness is certain, for it is recorded of him that he carried off the greatest number of College prizes that ever fell to the portion of one individual.

Passing over his elegant prize poem, his earliest production, “Fazio,” as being a regular acting drama, does not fall to be considered here ; but his “Fall of Jerusalem,” “Martyr of Antioch,” “Belshazzar,” and “Anne Boleyn,” although cast in a dramatic mould, were never intended for scenic representation, and approach, in most essentials, very closely to the mere poem. As such they have high and peculiar merits. In all there are fine, occasionally remarkable passages ; but they pall from similarity of tone ; and “The Fall of Jerusalem” has been generally thought the best, probably only because it was the first. These compositions are characterised by a copious command of high-toned language ; by descriptions occasionally rich, even to gorgeousness ; and above all, by passages of great lyrical beauty, some-

times simply pathetic, as in the funeral anthem, "Brother, thou hast gone before us," in the "Martyr of Antioch," but much more often swelling into organ-toned magnificence—

"With neck in thunder clothed,  
And long resounding pace,"

which Gray allegorically attributes to the march of Dryden's verse, as in the advent hymn, "For Thou wert born of Woman ;" and in the stanzas commencing—

"Even thus, amid thy pride and luxury,  
O Earth, shall that last coming burst on thee !"

with which the "Fall of Jerusalem" so grandly concludes.

The funeral anthem has always struck me as particularly fine ; and its solemn music has often, through many years, haunted my memory.

"Brother, thou art gone before us,  
And thy saintly soul is flown  
Where tears are wiped from every eye,  
And sorrow is unknown.  
From the burden of the flesh,  
And from care and fear released,  
Where the wicked cease from troubling,  
And the weary are at rest.

The toilsome way thou'st travelled o'er,  
And borne the heavy load ;  
But Christ hath taught thy languid feet  
To reach his blest abode.  
Thou'rt sleeping now, like Lazarus,  
Upon his Father's breast,  
Where the wicked cease from troubling,  
And the weary are at rest.

Sin can never taint thee now,  
 Nor doubt thy faith assail,  
 Nor thy meek trust in Jesus Christ  
 And the Holy Spirit fail ;  
 And there thou'rt sure to meet the good  
 Whom on earth thou lovedst best,  
 Where the wicked cease from troubling,  
 And the weary are at rest.

'Earth to earth,' and 'Dust to dust,'  
 The solemn priest hath said,  
 So we lay the turf above thee now,  
 And we seal thy narrow bed ;  
 But thy spirit, brother, soars away  
 Among the faithful blest,  
 Where the wicked cease from troubling,  
 And the weary are at rest."

"Samor, Lord of the Bright City," a heroic poem in twelve books, was the most elaborate and ambitious, but probably the least successful effort of its author, from its deficiency in nature and simplicity. It is over-written, and burthened with ornament and illustration. For eloquence we have redundant fluency, and for inspiration rhetoric ; and we are too frequently reminded, sometimes seemingly with intention, of the poetry of Greece and Rome, not only in the music, but in the spirit of particular passages. Milman's blank verse is modelled in a great measure on that of Southey ; but he has not attained the natural grace, the flexibility, and varied intonation of that great master. Nor can the subject of the poem be admitted to be happily chosen—the decay of ancient British and the rise of Saxon power—for the heroes and the incidents are all too remote, and undefined, and locally unimportant, to be so restored as to re-awaken strong or abiding interest.

As a poet, Milman is always sustained, elegant, eloquent, rhetorical ; but his imagery, though copious, is

seldom novel. He never startles by an unexpected burst of original power ; nor melts by those spontaneous minute touches of nature, which are common alike to the humble sketches of Clare, and the gorgeous pageantry of Coleridge. He overlays with ornament, until even the natural loses its charm, and we look and long in vain for the simple and unadorned :—hence it is that few or none of his lines recur as adages, like those of Burns or Wordsworth. He is continually straining after the grand, nor can it be said that his efforts are often quite unsuccessful, if taken as they stand by themselves ; but they are comparatively lost in the mass from lack of relief—as a long mountain chain loses in apparent altitude, without the break of some Mont Blanc or Chimborazo, or unless it be here and there intersected by winding valleys and abrupt ravines.

His miscellaneous poetry consists in translations from the Greek, from the Italian, and from Oriental sources, all elegant and scholarly ; and some “Hymns for Church Service,” originally published with those of Bishop Heber. These are all fine, more especially that for Good Friday.

As a poet, Dean Milman is deficient in nature and passion, and his imagination has not been allowed to escape with sufficient freedom from the trammels of scholastic rules, and the Procrustes-bed of classicality. We are always impressed with a conviction of his learning, his ability, and his cultivated taste, but are haunted at the same time with the unsatisfactory feeling, that his poetry is rather a clever recasting of fine things already familiar to us, than strikingly fresh and original. His ability as a critic, as the historian of the Jews, as the editor of Gibbon—whose baneful errors and assumptions he triumphantly combats—and as the commentator on Horace, are well known. With less leaning to authorities, and greater reliance on his own powers and impressions, there can be no doubt that Milman

would have written far finer poetry, and secured a more extended acceptability ; for his more simple strains are, after all, those best remembered, and he could be at times alike natural and pathetic.

It is not a little curious that our next two poets should be also distinguished clergymen of the Church of England—Dr Croly and the Honourable William Herbert.

George Croly first excited attention as a poet by his "Paris in 1815 ;" which, by its uncommon merits, at once gave him a fixed and distinguished place in literature, and was hailed as a probable harbinger of still greater achievements. This was followed in 1820 by "The Angel of the World," an Arabian, and by "Sebastian," a Spanish tale.

"The Angel" is a paraphrase of one of the most graceful fictions of the Koran, the fall from heaven of Haruth and Maruth, by the temptations of female beauty and wine. It is written in the Spenserian stanza, and with oriental gorgeousness and grace. But such subjects are too ethereal—they do not stand handling ; in their gossamer fabric they have the frailty of rose-leaves, besides being deficient in the materials which can alone command direct human sympathy.

"Sebastian" is a tale of greater length and higher pretensions—finer, as a composition, in some of its parts, as in the description of the Moorish palace of the Alhambra, which vies with those of Washington Irving and Mrs Hemans—and of the taking of the veil by a daughter of the house of Medina Sidonia, which is full of serene and solemn beauty ; but the poem is unequal to a degree that can only be laid to the score of sheer haste or carelessness—pleas which criticism dare not accept. Its faults are not those of poverty, but of redundancy ; and originate not from want of soil, or of sun and shower, but of the pruning-knife.

To Dr Croly's next productions, "Catiline, a Tragedy,"

and "Pride shall have a Fall," a comedy, I allude not farther than to say, that, although the former is in some measure marred by its departure from historical accuracy, both are characterised by that vigorous handling and life-like dialogue which carry attention on with unflagging interest; and throughout the comedy, some of its author's finest lyrics are gracefully interspersed. These productions for the stage were succeeded by a series of illustrative verses to Dagley's "Gems from the Antique," a *con amore* task, which he executed to admiration; these little poems being perhaps the most perfect things Dr Croly has written—although it would be difficult to be very definite or decided on this point, as hundreds of copies of verses from his indefatigable pen, some of them of surpassing excellence, lie scattered about—rich bouquets of unowned flowers—throughout the wide unbounded fields of periodical literature.

As a poet, Dr Croly has many great and shining qualities; a rich command of language, whether for the tender or the serious—an ear finely attuned to musical expression—a fertile and lucid conceptive power, and an intellect at once subtle and masculine. But it strikes me that he has never done full justice to his poetical genius, as none of his productions in verse at all come up to the standard of his undoubted capabilities. Most of his poems are liker effusions—mere sybilline leaves—than compositions. Thrown off at a heat, they have been given to the world without correction, and without elaboration; and hence we have passages of mere declamation seasoned with eloquence, and, not unfrequently, rhetoric unhesitatingly substituted for inspiration. Add to this, that his reputation as one of the most brilliant prose-writers of our time may be said to have, in some measure, eclipsed his lustre as a poet; for it would be difficult to point to any English style, save that of Edmund Burke's, at once so idiomatic



and eloquent, so full of rich variety, and of such unflagging spirit. These excellencies he has shown in the many able volumes of his professional writings, as well as in his countless contributions to general literature, in the romance of "Salathiel," the novel of "Marston," and the countless other outpourings of his voluminous and versatile pen.

The Hon. William Herbert first appeared before the public in a series of elegant and spirited translations from the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, as also, and more particularly, from the Danish and Icelandic. The latter were much admired by Sir Walter Scott and other competent judges, as well from their novelty and real merit, as from the tact with which the author had succeeded in reproducing the Sagas of the Scalds in language at once chastened, rich, and harmonious. There can be little doubt that this went far in determining the bent of the author's mind to the antiquities, language, and literature of Scandinavia; for, with the exception of a few short but exquisite fragments by Gray, he felt that the field was untraversed, and his own; and he strenuously exerted himself to do for it what Byron had been doing for the Turkish, and Southey for the Hindoo mythology. As a first result, his "Helga," a poem in seven cantos, appeared in 1815, and was evidently the fruit of much diligent labour and research, culled from what to most would have been regarded as very unpromising materials. There was less danger in rejecting than in selecting; but he must have felt that even the best cooked of his illustrations of the superstitions, customs, and scenery of Scandinavia, required a considerable dash of classical sauce, to fit them for more southern palates; and they thus lost in Norse raciness what they gained in delicacy. "Helga" can have but slender claims to originality of style or manner, when we know that it was written after the "Rokeby" of Scott; although it may be also

regarded as one of the other few triumphs over what Lord Byron has termed "the fatal facility of the octosyllabic measure." Herbert wrote with elegance always, and occasionally with power, but we have ever far more art than genius; and from his anxiety to be learnedly correct, he too frequently runs the risk of becoming heavy and monotonous.

The story relates to the appearance of a party of wild Berserkars from Denmark, at the palace of King Ingva, their chief, demanding his daughter Helga in marriage; or, on refusal, to fight his most redoubted champion in single combat. The challenge is accepted by Hialmar, a brave young knight, and the secret admirer of the princess, who defies him to mortal encounter on the island of Samsöe. Meanwhile Helga is conveyed by visions down to "Hela's drear abode," where she learns that the Berserkar is only to be conquered by a falchion, then in the hand of a giant-statue, amid the enchanted mines of the far north. Hialmar determines on possessing it, and his adventures are picturesquely described; but snares being laid for him, after he has succeeded in his enterprise, he falls into these, and poetical justice is decreed. As he is about to enter the fated field, the dread apparitional appearance of the Valkyriur, or Maids of Slaughter, who cross his way, forewarns him of impending doom. The huge Berserkar, indeed, falls beneath his victorious falchion, but from the extent of his own wounds, he speedily bleeds to death; and meanwhile, as Helga with an anxious heart is awaiting the result, Asbiorn, a disappointed rival, savagely carrying on his shoulders the lifeless body of Hialmar, lays it within her arms, and instantly her spirit passes away in silence, and without a sign.

In the management of his materials, Herbert certainly did much to temper, with chaster ornaments, the rude wildness of Scaldic fiction, and to give to its monstrosities the hues and lineaments of poetry. His

descriptions are terse and animated, and he often paints in hues vivid and intense. He seldom offends against good taste, either in his selection of subjects, or his manner of treating them; and the marks of fine scholarship are everywhere apparent in his compositions.

“Attila” was the last and most ambitious production of Herbert; his most laboured, but not his most successful one. The fire of his youthful enthusiasm had been gradually burning out, and this he endeavoured, but vainly, to atone for, by a strict adherence to Aristotelian rules, backed by the Gallican codicils of Boileau and Bossu. He stumbles between the cold stateliness of Glover’s “Leonidas,” and Wilkie’s “Epigoniad,” and the flowery exuberances of Edwin Atherstone and Abraham Heraud. Nature is shut out by art, or perishes under the tyrannous tutelage of refinement and propriety. Striking scenes and situations are occasionally opened up, and judiciously treated; but there is a lack alike of great beauties and of great faults. Yet Herbert had an eye and a heart for nature, and there are few fresher or finer things in descriptive poetry than his lines in Helga, on the sudden outburst of the Northern spring:—

“Yestre’en the mountain’s rugged brow  
 Was mantled o’er with dreary snow:  
 The sun sat red behind the hill,  
 And every breath of wind was still;  
 But ere he rose, the southern blast  
 A veil o’er heaven’s blue arch had cast;  
 Thick rolled the clouds, and genial rain  
 Poured the wide deluge o’er the plain.  
 Fair glens and verdant vales appear,  
 And warmth awakes the budding year.  
 O, ’tis the touch of fairy hand  
 That wakes the spring of Northern land:  
 It warms not there by slow degrees,  
 With changeful pulse, the uncertain breeze;

But sudden, on the wondering sight  
 Bursts forth the beam of living light,  
 And instant verdure springs around,  
 And magic flowers bedeck the ground.  
 Returned from regions far away,  
 The red-winged throistle pours his lay;  
 The soaring snipe salutes the spring,  
 While the breeze whistles through his wing;  
 And as he hails the melting snows,  
 The heath-cock claps his wings and crows."

It would be difficult to point to any single year in the history of our literature so rich and varied in production as 1812. To it we owe, together with several lesser triumphs, the "Childe Harold" of Byron, the "Rokeby" of Scott, "The Isle of Palms" of Wilson, "The Queen's Wake" of James Hogg, the "Anster Fair" of William Tennant, and the "Rejected Addresses" of Horace and James Smith.

The introduction to British literature of the *Ottava Rima*, long familiar to the readers of the serio-comic conventional poetry of Italy, in the pages of Pulci, Casti, Berni, Tassoni, and Ariosto, most certainly appertains—whether for good or evil—to William Tennant, an almost self-taught genius, at the time an obscure clerk in a merchant's store, in the old, quaint, little town of Anstruther in Fife, and at the period of his death a Doctor of Laws, and Professor of Oriental Languages in the University of St Andrews.

Tennant's other works were a tragedy on "Cardinal Beaton"—ineffective as a drama, but abounding in passages of high merit and interest; "The Thane of Fife;" and "The Dinging Down of the Cathedral,"—the last written in imitation of the antique style, and in the orthography, of the once celebrated Scottish poets, William Dunbar and Sir David Lyndsay. It is wonderful to observe how gaily his Pegasus prances under such a load of grotesque trappings, which, how-

ever, were quite unnecessary, and in equivocal taste ; so that the cleverness exhibited may be said in a great measure to have been thrown away. Tennant's latest poetical collection — the "Hebrew Hymns and Eclogues" — showed an evident decline of power ; were deficient in freshness and variety ; and, in as far as fame was concerned, might have been advantageously withheld.

Tennant's first was, beyond all comparison, also his best poem. The merit of "Anster Fair" consists in its lively effervescence of animal spirits, and in the varied copiousness of its imagery, drawn alike from the gay and the sententious, from the classical and the romantic, from fancy and from observation. There is a good deal of minute painting throughout, evidently after nature, and in several places it rises not only to the dignity and elevation of true poetry, but possesses one image at least which borders on the sublime. It is where, in enumerating the motley parties flocking, from different parts of the country, to the festivities of the fair, we have these lines—

" Comes next from Ross-shire and from Sutherland  
 The horny-knuckled kilted Highlandman :  
 From where, *upon the rocky Caithness strand,*  
*Breaks the long wave that at the Pole began.*"

The following stanzas, descriptive of the personal charms of the heroine, have some of the distinctive beauties just alluded to :—

" Her form was as the morning's blithesome star,  
 That, capped with crimson coronet of beams,  
 Rides up the dawning orient in her car,  
 New washed and doubly fulgent from the streams—  
 The Chaldee shepherd eyes her light afar,  
 And on his knees, adores her as she gleams :

So shone the stately form of Maggy Lauder,  
And so the admiring clouds pay homage and applaud her.

Her face was as the summer cloud, whereon  
The dawning sun delights to rest his rays !  
Compared with it old Sharon's Vale, o'ergrown  
With flaunting roses, had resigned its praise.  
For why? Her face with heaven's own roses shone,  
Mocking the morn, and witching men to gaze ;  
And he that gazed with cold unsmitten soul,  
That blockhead's heart was ice, thrice baked beneath the  
Pole."

It was not till five years after the appearance of "Anster Fair," that Mr Hookham Frere put forth his brochure, so full of clever whimsicality and elegant nonchalance, the "Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, by William and Robert Whistlecraft of Stowmarket, in Suffolk, Harness and Collar Makers." With less, perhaps, of real poetical imagination than Tennant, Frere exhibited much more dexterity in the use of his weapons: his wit is more refined and his scholarship more dexterous. To say nothing of the "Beppo" and "Don Juan" of Byron, and the "Ring of Gyges" and "Spanish Story" of Barry Cornwall, a crowd of imitators have since followed in the same alluring path, but certainly without any one having quite come up to Whistlecraft in his peculiar eccentric excellencies. To me the following stanzas, with which the third canto opens, have always appeared inimitable in their way:—

"I've a proposal here from Mr Murray.  
He offers, handsomely, the money down;  
My dear, you might recover from your flurry  
In a nice airy lodging out of town,  
At Croydon, Epsom, anywhere in Surrey.  
If every stanza brings us in a crown,  
I think that I might venture to bespeak  
A bedroom and front parlour for next week.

Tell me, my dear Thalia, what you think ;  
 Your nerves have undergone a sudden shock ;  
 Your poor dear spirits have begun to sink—  
 On Banstead Downs you'll muster a new stock ;  
 And I'd be sure to keep away from drink,  
 And always go to bed by twelve o'clock.  
 We'll travel down there in the morning stages ;—  
 Our verses shall go down to distant ages.

And here, in town, we'll breakfast on hot rolls,  
 And you shall have a better shawl to wear ;  
 These pantaloons of mine are chafed in holes ;  
 By Monday next I'll compass a new pair :  
 Come now fling up the cinders, fetch the coals,  
 And take away the things you hung to air ;  
 Set out the tea-things, and bid Phœbe bring  
 The kettle up. 'Arms, and the monks I sing.'”

The following stanzas from “Beppo,” are pitched exactly on the same key, and approach the perfection of the nonchalant style of rhymical improvisation :—

“Oh that I had the art of easy writing  
 What should be easy reading ! Could I scale  
 Parnassus, where the Muses sit inditing  
 Those pretty poems never known to fail,  
 How quickly would I print, the world delighting,  
 A Grecian, Syrian, or Assyrian tale ;  
 And sell you, mixed with western sentimentalism,  
 Some samples of the finest orientalism.

But I am but a nameless sort of person,  
 (A broken Dandy lately on my travels,)  
 And take, for rhyme to hook my rambling verse on,  
 The first that Walker's Lexicon unravels ;  
 And when I can't find that, I put a worse on,  
 Not caring, as I ought, for critics' cavils ;  
 I've half a mind to tumble down to prose,  
 But verse is more in fashion—so here goes.”

This species of poetry, if we are to dignify it with

that name—which, like charity, covers a multitude of peculiarities—was characterised more especially by its light humour, by its approximating and blending together seeming incongruities; by its airy, rapid, picturesque narrative; by its commixture of the grave, the pathetic, and the majestic, with the frivolous, the farcical, and the absurd: and bore the same relation to the epic and narrative that ginger-pop bears to champagne, or Grimaldi the clown to John Kemble the tragedian. It was a graft on our indigenous British stock from the Italian; and was succeeded, in temporary popularity at least, by another variety, of which it would be more difficult to point out the original prototype. This last may be characterised as being little else than an adoption of the mere vesture of verse for poetry, the rhymes, or outer garments, being substituted as the prime quality in demand; and these the more numerous and complex the better. Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary* was thus made the fountain of Helicon; the ingenuity of the artificer exhibiting itself in his being able to thread these jingles upon some string of narrative—a labour to be compared only to the Chinese polishing of cherry-stones. The double and tripartite rhymes of Butler were mere occasional exuberances of his metrical opulence; but, with the Barham and Hood school, such were made to form the staple commodity in demand. In "The Ingoldsby Legends," it is not to be denied, however, that there is a nucleus of real poetry—elements of fancy and pathos; while the metrical cleverness can only be matched by Southey's "How does the water come down at Lodore?" and stands in the same relation to horsemanship as the gymnastic legerdemain at Cook's or Franconi's does to the equestrianism of the race-ground or the hunting-field.

Here is one of Barham's pictures—a Bacchanalian domestic quarrel, and its consequences:—



“Mrs Pryce’s tongue ran long, and ran fast ;  
 But patience is apt to wear out at last,  
 And David Pryce in temper was quick,  
 So he stretched out his hand, and caught hold of a stick ;  
 Perhaps in its use he might mean to be lenient,  
 But walking just then was not very convenient,  
     So he threw it instead,  
     Direct at her head ;  
     It knocked off her hat ;  
     Down she fell flat ;  
 Her case, perhaps, was not much mended by that :  
 But whatever it was, whether rage and pain  
 Produced apoplexy, or burst a vein,  
 Or her tumble produced a concussion of brain,  
 I can’t say for certain, but this I can,  
 When sobered by fright, to assist her he ran,  
 Mrs Winnifred Pryce was as dead—as Queen Anne !

    The fearful catastrophe,  
     Named in my last strophe,  
 As adding to grim Death’s exploits such a vast trophy,  
 Soon made a great noise ; and the shocking fatality  
 Ran over, like wildfire, the whole Principality.  
 And then came Mr Ap Thomas the coroner,  
 With his jury to sit, some dozen or more on her.  
     Mr Pryce, to commence  
     ‘ His ingenious defence,’  
 Made ‘ a powerful appeal ’ to the jury’s ‘ good sense ;’  
     The world he must defy,  
     Ever to justify  
 Any presumption of ‘ malice prepense.’

    The unlucky lick  
     From the end of his stick  
 He ‘ deplored,’ he was apt to be rather too quick ;  
     But, really, her prating  
     Was so aggravating,  
 Some trifling correction was just what he meant ; all  
 The rest, he assured them, was ‘ quite accidental.’

Then he called Mr Jones,  
 Who deposed to her tones,  
 And her gestures, and hints about 'breaking his bones.'  
 While Mr Ap Morgan, and Mr Ap Rhyse,  
 Declared the deceased  
 Had styled him 'a Beast,'  
 And swore they had witnessed with grief and surprise,  
 The allusions she made to his limbs and his eyes.

The jury, in fine, having sat on the body  
 The whole day discussing the case and gin-toddy,  
 Returned about half-past eleven at night  
 The following verdict, we find—'Sarved her right!'"

With this harlequin elasticity of thought—this railroad velocity of rhyming, and with ability of a certain kind and in no mean degree admitted, Barham, after all, as a poetical artist, cannot be said to stand on the same level with Thomas Hood, who really possessed, along with this jugglery, "the vision and the faculty divine;" and, even in contest on their own peculiar ground—when, like two circus clowns, striving to show which could behave the most grotesquely—the palm must be awarded to Hood, who has contrived, in his "Miss Kilmansegg, with her Golden Leg," not only to outdo "the Ingoldsby Legends" in rich exuberance of rhyming clatter, but to extract from it some excellent moral lessons.

The wit and humour of Theodore Hook flashed on another path; and that alternately as song-writer and satirist—as play-wright and novel-writer—as essayist and biographer. His readiness was miraculous, amounting almost to improvisation; but, as might have been expected from this, his genius wanted depth and concentration—it dazzled and disappeared like ground-lightning, or the aurora-borealis. He caught his inspiration from passing topics, and not from the survey of grand principles; and thus was liker Gilray than

Hogarth — liker H. B. than George Cruickshank. Everything that he attempted was adapted to the meridian of the current day ; he caught its tone, and his success was proportionate. His brochures accomplished their purpose effectively, and, having done so, left nothing behind but the memory of their exceeding cleverness.

The natural talents of Theodore Hook, if not of a very lofty order, were certainly, in their way, quite extraordinary ; and his conversational readiness and brilliancy — his sharpness of repartee, and the wit and humour “ he wove on his sleeve ” — must have verged on the wonderful ere they could have elicited the admiration of, and been attested by, such competent and critical judges as Brinsley Sheridan, S. T. Coleridge, and John Lockhart. As a dramatist and novel-writer, Hook’s works are exceedingly voluminous, and are all more or less impressed with the sparkling qualities of his mind — vivid power of description, acute observation, sarcastic point and variety. Doubtless, his wit and humour were apt to degenerate into buffoonery, his pathos into sentimentality, and his nature into conventionalism ; but his knowledge of city life, in its manners, habits, and language, seemed intuitive, and has been surpassed only by Fielding and Dickens. Many and multifarious, however, as are his volumes, he has left behind him no great creation — nothing that can be pointed to as a triumphant index of the extraordinary powers which he undoubtedly possessed.

Brilliant, but far less brilliant in their natural and acquired endowments than Theodore Hook, were the brothers Horace and James Smith — not so the impression they have managed to leave behind them. Their first combined work, “ The Rejected Addresses,” stood and stands without a parallel in our literature. It is a thing *sui generis*, and must have high merit ; for, often as its popularity has been attempted to be shaken by

younger hands, and the adaptation of newer themes to similar management, it remains not only unsurpassed, but is literally a first without a second. Written for a temporary purpose in 1812, it still remains a staple production in 1851; and probably no better, or at least more truthful and striking, epitome of the greater and smaller authors, whose characteristic excellencies, peculiarities, and defects it professes to imitate, can anywhere be found than in its lively and ludicrous pages. Among its happiest things are the imitations of Crabbe and Coleridge, by James Smith; and of Scott and Byron, by Horace. Exquisitely humorous as are the Monk Lewis, the Wordsworth, the Southey, and the Fitzgerald, they can be regarded merely as travesties, and are consequently far inferior to those mentioned in value. The only other joint production of the Smiths, the "Horace in London," bears many traces of the same cleverness; but the pieces are very unequal, and are mostly rather indications than expressions of peculiar power; and the volume is now out of date, from its entirely referring to the current levities, humours, and topics of London life at the time when it appeared.

With classical taste, shrewd observation, humour, wit, and feeling, it is a strange fact that James and Horace Smith were alike much more eminent for their imitative than for their original powers—a fact demonstrated by those compositions which each respectively gave the world as his own; and in this point of view they were inferior to another of kindred mind, the Hon. William Robert Spencer, whose muse, like theirs, and that of Theodore Hook, was happiest in the dedication of its powers to the enlivenment of the social hour, or in the composition of what the French have termed *Vers de Sociétés*. In the ballad of "Beth Gelert," and in one or two of his lyrics, Spencer tried the working of a deeper vein, and not unsuccessfully. His verses, which are generally light and complimentary, have more of the

sparkle and polish of Moore than those of the Smiths ; and bring to mind the paste-diamond conceits of Waller, Cowley, and Crashaw. But all three seem to stand much on the same level as poets ; and, indeed, to have adopted the same canons in composition, as well as the same field for their selection of subjects. Nor would it be easy to excel, in its way, either the "Retrospection," or the "Upas Tree" of James Smith, which are pervaded by a tone of rich mellow sentiment ; or the "Verses on the Terrace at Windsor," and the "Address to the Mummy at Belzoni's" of Horace, both full of strikingly graphic touches—the latter especially, which started into an instant popularity, which through thirty years it has maintained, in a degree second only to Wolfe's "Stanzas on the Burial of Sir John Moore."

I must now retrace my steps for a good many years backwards, to take up the commencement of the literary career of one who, however, had not even by this time ascended to the culminating point of his reputation—I mean the great poet of Ireland, Thomas Moore. Perhaps one of the best modes of bringing out the peculiar excellencies of his genius would be by contrasting it with that of Lord Byron—to whom, in the externals of poetry, he seemed to bear a stronger affinity than to any other author. But, in truth, Thomas Moore had no relation to Lord Byron, except by the association of contrast ; and when set down beside him, however much they may be thought to assimilate in lyrical flow and fervour, in choice of subjects, and in exquisite harmony of expression, the marks of Moore's originality are sufficiently distinctive. With a more buoyant, brilliant, and active fancy than the author of "Childe Harold" and "The Corsair," Moore does not possess, in an equal degree, either Byron's intensity of passion or vigour of expression. The current of his thought, although more lively, is shallower ; his ideas float more on the surface of his mind. Moore is the poet of sun-

shine and summer ; Byron of tempest and desolation. The one revels amid the joyful forebodings of youthful hope and ardent fancy ; the other broods over the wreck and ruins of the human heart, until it is felt that "'tis something better not to be." The genius of Moore may be compared to the gay peacock, to the radiant rainbow, to the coruscations of the aurora-borealis amid the deep blue of the northern sky ; that of Byron to the chained eagle, to the devastating whirlwind, to the volcano blazing with tyrannic fury through the silence and shadows of midnight—luridly glaring on the affrighted earth, and evolving its sulphureous blackness over the starry canopy.

Moore's early fancy luxuriated among the classics, and his elegant, spirited, and congenial translation—say rather paraphrase—of Anacreon was the first fruits. It ran through a long series of editions, and was succeeded by the "Odes and Epistles" in 1806, when the author had formed that style, so full of airy gracefulness, which he afterwards stamped as his own. Many of the pieces in this collection he has never since excelled—as the "Lines at the Cohos, or Falls of the Mohawk River," "The Epistle to Lord Strangford," "Peace and Glory," "Dead Man's Isle," and the "Canadian Boat-Song ;" but it unfortunately includes several also, which, as sinning against delicacy and decorum, ought never to have been written, far less to have seen the light of publication. That the late Lord Jeffrey branded these as they deserved redounds to the honour of his memory ; and it should not be withheld, that their author afterwards sincerely regretted such an act of thoughtless levity.

As a specimen of Moore's finest early manner, I give the "Lines on the Falls of the Mohawk River."

From rise of morn, till set of sun,  
I've seen the mighty Mohawk run,  
And, as I marked the woods of pine  
Along his mirror darkly shine,

Like tall and gloomy forms that pass  
 Before the wizard's midnight glass ;  
 And as I viewed the hurrying pace  
 With which he ran his turbid race,  
 Rushing, alike untired and wild,  
 Thro' shades that frowned and flowers that smiled,  
 Flying by every green recess  
 That wooed him to its calm caress,  
 Yet, sometimes turning with the wind,  
 As if to leave a look behind !  
 Oh ! I have thought, and thinking sighed—  
 How like to thee, thou restless tide !  
 May be the lot, the life of him,  
 Who roams along thy water's brim !  
 Through what alternate shades of woe  
 And flowers of joy my path may go !  
 How many an humble still retreat  
 May rise to court my weary feet,  
 While still pursuing, still unblest,  
 I wander on, nor dare to rest !  
 But urgent, as the doom that calls  
 Thy water to its destined falls,  
 I feel the world's bewildering force  
 Hurry my heart's devoted course  
 From lapse to lapse, till life be done,  
 And the last current cease to run !  
 Oh may my falls be bright as thine—  
 May Heaven's forgiving rainbow shine  
 Upon the mist that circles me,  
 As soft as now it hangs o'er thee !”

Mr Moore next tried his hand at light, lively, and elegant satire, chiefly political—as in his “ Twopenny Post-Bag,” his “ Fudge Family in Paris,” his “ Fables for the Holy Alliance,” and his “ Rhymes on the Road.” All these are exceedingly clever in their way, and would have been much more pungent, had not the happy temper of the author uniformly extracted the sting of each sarcasm by a joke. As compounds of causticity and

point, with sprightly humour and witty illustration, they are, however, in their way, unexcelled. Before the two latter of these volumes appeared, Moore had begun to turn his genius to a worthier subject—the "Irish Melodies;" and on the words connected with these, his fame with posterity may be safely permitted to rest. They are by no means so distinctively national as they might have been; but, considered as poetry, it would be difficult to improve on most of them. I must say, however, that I like him in these much better as the amatory than the warlike bard; and would not give his "Go where Glory waits thee," his "Young May Moon," his "Has Sorrow thy young Days shaded?" his "Come, rest in this bosom," his "Vale of Avoca," his "When he who adores thee," and his "One fatal Remembrance," for all the harps that ever rung in Tara's halls, or all the "Golden Collars" that ever Malachi "won from the fierce invader."

In his satires Moore wields not the masculine club of Dryden; nor does he approach to the moral sublime of Pope. His genius has much more resemblance to that of Matthew Prior; and, indeed, this resemblance is sometimes so strong that whole pieces from either writer might be transposed, without much chance of the barter being detected. Yet I do not remember of having ever seen this similarity of thought, style, and manner, even once prominently alluded to. His lyrical under-tones have much more resemblance to those of Carew, Herrick, Lovelace, and Suckling.

Fine as were many things he had done, yet, until the publication of "Lalla Rookh," in 1817, Moore could be only regarded as a poet of promise. Many of the Irish songs were indeed surpassingly beautiful; but they were mere snatches of inspiration—short, "like angel visits;" and perhaps what he intended to be their leading attraction—their frequent allusions to remote Irish tradition—is in truth their greatest blemish, as



these are often apparently forced into the ranks "like unwilling volunteers;" although to the patriotic feelings which dictated this trait I bow with sincere admiration and respect. The most beautiful specimens of Moore's "words wed to verse" are those in which he has unbosomed sentiments and reflections, loves and longings and regrets, common to the whole of mankind, and which find, accordingly, a sympathetic echo in every bosom. From his versatile and active fancy, combined with a delicate taste and a rich and ever-ready command of language, it is not surprising that he has utterly eclipsed all cotemporary song-writers. Indeed, in this particular department, he has no superior within the whole range of poetical literature save one—Robert Burns—who is indeed beyond him and all others, alike in delicacy and depth. Burns and Moore, however, may not unaptly be taken as the typified genii of their respective countries—the latter of Ireland, with its laughing grace, its airy light-heartedness, its gushing eloquence, its harp and its trefoil; the former of Scotland, more staid in mood, yet not less deep in passion, with the gathered wild-flowers in one hand, "a' to be a posie for his own dear May," and in the other the bearded thistle, with its significant emblazon, "Wha daur meddle wi' me?"

After some years of studious retirement, during which Moore, like James Hogg in his "Queen's Wake," had determined to tax all his powers to the utmost for one grand effort, "Lalla Rookh" appeared; nor did it disappoint public expectation. The preliminary reading which it cost its author must have been stupendous; and the greatest triumph of his genius consists in his having extracted from materials so bulky and so heterogeneous, such an unalloyed mass of beauty. Its great charm consists in the romance of its situations and characters, the splendour of its diction and style, and the prodigal copiousness of its imagery. Indeed, its

principal fault is want of repose ; it is overloaded with ornament : you cannot see the green turf for roses ; you cannot see the blue heaven for stars ; and the narrative is thus clogged, while its interest is marred. Of the four stories of which "Lalla Rookh" is composed, "The Veiled Prophet" is the most ambitious, but the least successful, although it contains some rich and powerful passages ; and the "Fire Worshippers" the most varied in its transitions from tenderness to energy, from minute and delicate to broad and rapid handling.

In the versification of "The Veiled Prophet" there is a luxurious laxity, a rich slovenliness, which at first sounds doubtfully in ears accustomed to the majestic energy of Dryden, the mellow sweetness of Goldsmith, or the classic grace of Campbell ; and, without exactly agreeing with Byron, that Moore did not understand the heroic couplet, I certainly think it the least happy of his measures. The tone of the greater part of the poem is imposing and gorgeously magnificent ; and its manners go far beyond even the silken luxury of the East ; but the scenes between Azim and Zelica, which bring us back to realities, are replete with chastened pathetic beauty ; and the conclusion, which is one of gentle repose, breathes over the mind a calm full of sweetness, like the south wind fresh from a bed of violets.

To feel that Moore has wandered from his natural demesne in "The Veiled Prophet," we have only to turn to the exquisite fiction of "Paradise and the Peri" —of his happy things by much the happiest. It is distinguished by all his peculiar excellencies of matter and manner ; it is "the bright consummate flower" of his genius. Nothing can be finer than the pictures of the beautiful outcast from the celestial regions, bathing her white wings in the sunshine over the ruins of Palmyra —of the patriot expiring on the battle-field with the

broken blade in his grasp—or of the conscience-stricken prodigal surveying the sports of childhood, and, like “The Robber Moor,” reverting with a bleeding heart to the days of innocence.

“Ah! happy years! once more who would not be a boy!”

“The Fire Worshippers” deals more in incident than sentiment and action, and, as a narrative poem, thus brings its author more into comparison with his two great rivals, Scott and Byron. Hinda is a beautiful creation, although it would be difficult to find her prototype in the living world. She is all love, and belief, and tears—the embodied spirit of confiding tenderness—a thing of semi-celestial elements, walking in an enchanted circle, and throwing around her a halo of unearthly beauty. The conflict between passion and patriotism in the bosom of her lover, the chief of the Guebirs, is powerfully portrayed; and his heroic determination compels our admiration for himself, and our regret for Hinda. We behold him striking the last blow for his country’s liberty, and, when baffled in the attempt, amid the encompassing shades of night, throwing himself upon the funeral pyre, a sacrifice to his faith—the “last of a mighty line.”

“The Light of the Harem” is all air and fire, mirth and music, love and roses. It is a trifle, to be sure, but such a trifle as was most difficult to get up and manage—the hero a self-willed prince, and the heroine a peevish pouting beauty. The chief merit of the piece lies in the exquisite lyrics interspersed throughout. Every adjunct is to the highest pitch splendid, sparkling, and magnificent; nothing is to be heard but music; nothing to be thought of but enjoyment; nothing to be seen but the dazzling beauties of the East, amid moonlight fountains and groves of fragrance. “The Loves of the Angels” is a great descent from “Lalla Rookh.” As a poem it is as the “Odyssey” to the “Iliad,” as the “Paradise

Regained" to the "Paradise Lost." In the tales of "The Three Angels" there certainly are some brilliant passages; but the interest in them is evanescent, and the pageant dies off, like pyrotechnic displays, in mid air, in mere brilliant sparkles. As a moral tale, it may be compared to the cases reported at length in the police courts, that end in a reproof from the judge and the conviction of the offender, but have from their subjects a doubtful effect on the public mind. "The Epicurean" is illustrated by verse, although substantially in prose. It seems to have been intended by the author for a poem, and commenced as such, but given up on his coming to some unmanageable incidents. It is a powerful and extraordinary performance, and is worthy to stand on the same shelf with "Vathek," although readers of the "Vie de Sethos," and "Les Voyages d'Antenor," may not accord it a pure originality, at least in parts.

Many of the ancient fables—as those of Comus, of Orpheus, of Amphion, of Timotheus, of St Cecilia—are nothing more than beautiful allegorical illustrations of the power of poetry and music over the human mind; and, in our own day, the strains of genuine inspiration have proved themselves to be as irresistible as ever. The poetry of Moore—abstracting the artificial glare and glitter, which are its drawbacks—is of this elevating and ethereal kind, full of harmony, and spirit, and splendour; of the heroic romantic virtues of man, and the clinging confiding tenderness of woman; of the beauty of the inferior creatures, and the magnificence of nature. He seems to have drawn in with the first breath of existence the very spirit of gladness, which, operating on fervid sensibilities and a lively imagination, has rendered him acutely alive to impressions from within and without, to all "the impulses of soul and sense." His ever buoyant effervescing spirits will not allow gloomy associations any permanent hold;

and they are shaken off like thunder-drops from the plumage of the swan. He ever rejoices to escape from the tempest into the sunshine, and to look back on the rainbow. He shuns the desolate bleakness of the December landscape, with its snow-wreaths, its frozen streams, its leafless trees, and its whistling wind, that he may luxuriate under summer suns, where nature spontaneously clothes herself with blossoms, spreading her bosom to the south, and offering up a feast to all that lives. His muse is like one of his own Eastern Peris, full of life, light, and beauty—a froward and restless cherub, too animated to be ever listless, and too full of buoyant gaiety to bestow aught but a transient tear, a passing sigh, on the misfortunes, or crimes, or follies of mankind—whose delight is in the witcheries of art and nature; whose flight is above the damping materialities of the grosser elements—whose thoughts are a concatenation of thick-blown fancies, whose syllables are music.

The genius of Thomas Moore is essentially lyrical. In mind and manner he is the very antipodes of Crabbe. The author of "The Borough" took a supreme delight in picking his steps through the mire of meanness, and in making sketches of the most unlovely parts of the creation. Moore, on the contrary, preferred sitting with Calypso in her grot, to struggling, like Ulysses, between the Sicilian whirlpools.

The "Sacred Songs" exhibit a curious combination of airy elegance of thought, language, and imagery with solemn themes. They share in the general faults of Moore's poetry—too much glitter and too little depth; ornaments too elaborately studied, and metaphors bordering on conceit. The finest—and they are really fine—are "O Thou that driest the Mourner's Tear," "There's nothing true but Heaven," and "The Dove let loose in Eastern Skies."

I cannot part with Thomas Moore without giving a characteristic specimen of the "Melodies:"—

"The young May moon is beaming, love,  
 The glowworm's lamp is gleaming, love ;  
     How sweet to rove  
     Through Morna's grove  
 While the drowsy world is dreaming, love !  
 Then awake, the heavens look bright, my dear !  
 'Tis never too late for delight, my dear !  
     And the best of all ways  
     To lengthen our days  
 Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear !

Now all the world is sleeping, love,  
 But the sage his star-watch keeping, love ;  
     And I, whose star,  
     More glorious far,  
 Is the eye from that casement peeping, love.  
 Then awake till rise of sun, my dear ;  
 The sage's glass we'll shun, my dear ;  
     Or, in watching the flight  
     Of bodies of light,  
 He might happen to take thee for one, my dear !"

To conclude, Thomas Moore has been styled the national poet of Ireland ; and so he is, in the same sense as Tasso is of the Venetians, or Beranger of the French, or Burns of our own Scotland ; for he has patriotically consecrated his finest powers to the exposition and illustration of Ireland's peculiar feelings and associations, local, personal, and traditionary. Hence he is beloved by his countrymen, and deserves to be so, beyond all Ireland's other poets—for it is only in the philosophic reveries of the closet that man is a cosmopolite. He never can be any such Utopian monster ; and, from a thousand circumstances, it is evident that nature never intended he should be so, looking even at the conformity of colour to climate, and the productions of that climate to its specific wants. A Greenlander could no more subsist on the rice-and-water diet of a Hindoo, than the Hindoo could on the oleaginous nutriment essentially

necessary for feeding the lamp of animal life in the frost-bound herbless solitude which forms the other's habitat; and it is the same, in some measure, even with plants and the lower animals. But man is more than these, and has a double nature, his sensibilities surrounding him like the fingers of a polypus. The place of birth, the scenes of infancy, the associations of home,—do not these link the heart not only to a particular country on the world's map, but to a particular spot in that country, "on which the tired eye rests, and calls it home!" Yes, and by a thousand Lilliputian ties—each, it may be, like a spider's thread in tenuity, but their united strength is irresistible, making that home the dearest spot in all the world, alike to the poor savage,

"——whose untutored mind  
Hears God in storms, and sees Him in the wind,  
And thinks, admitted to an equal sky,  
His faithful dog shall bear him company,"

and to the modern Greek, who, unforgetful of the ancient glory and greatness of his ancestral country, weeps as he wanders over the field of Marathon. "Give me," said the patriotic Fletcher of Saltoun, strong in his knowledge of man's nature—"give me the making of a nation's songs, and I will leave to others the making of its laws." Nor can this feeling cease to be the same to the end of time, unless man's very nature changes; for it has been the same in strength through all bypast ages. Jacob directed his bones to be carried up out of Egypt, to the sepulchral cave of his fathers at Machpelah. Ruth, as the strongest proof that devoted affection could give to the mother of her deceased husband, exclaimed to Naomi,—“Where thou goest I will go, and thy country shall be my country.” Virgil, in the exquisite line,

“Moritur, et moriens dulces reminiscitur Argos,”

makes his dying Greek turn, in latest thought, to the pleasant fields of his nativity ; and, as mentioned in a former lecture, John Leyden, in the delirium of a mortal fever at Java, was heard repeating snatches of old Border songs. Verstigan mentions that a traveller in Palestine was once startled by a captive Scotswoman singing, as she dandled her baby at the door of one of the Arab tents,—“Oh, Bothwell bank, thou bloomest fair !” and Mrs Hemans has founded one of the most beautiful of her lyrics on the affecting incident of a poor Indian in the Botanical Garden at Paris melting into tears at the sight of a palm-tree, which, heedless of the crowds around him, he rushed forward to and embraced. Rogers has exquisitely depicted the Savoyard boy, lingering ere he leaves the brow of the last hill, which overlooks “the churchyard yews ’neath which his fathers sleep ;” and the Abbé Raynal, in his “History of the West Indies,” relates that, when the Canadian Indians were asked to emigrate, their touching reply was—“What ! shall we ask the bones of our fathers to arise, and go with us ?”

Such are the ties which are spun around the heart of humanity, and among the finest of its sensibilities are those of Poetry and Music ; and, if each be so strong when dissociated, their united spell must prove doubly so. Even among the proverbially hireling Swiss, we know that Napoleon, to prevent desertion from his ranks, found it necessary to prohibit the chanting of the “Ranz des Vaches ;” and Campbell has finely said—and not less truly than finely—that

“Encamped by Indian rivers wild,  
 The soldier, resting on his arms,  
 In Burns’s carol sweet recalls  
 The songs that blest him when a child,  
 And glows and gladdens at the charms  
 Of Scotia’s woods and waterfalls.”



“One touch of nature,” as Shakspeare says, “makes the whole world kin,” and what that national music and that national poetry are to the Scots, that national poetry and that national music are to the Irish. Burns and Moore have, therefore, a double guarantee of immortality ; for they have wedded undying lays to undying notes, and thus not only driven the nail of security to the head, but have riveted it on the other side.

## LECTURE V.

New phases of the poetic mind.—Leigh Hunt ; Story of Rimini and Miscellanies. — Specimens, *Funeral Procession*, and *The Glove*.— Characteristics of the new school.—John Keats, *Endymion*, *Lamia* ; his untutored fancy. —Extracts from *Eve of St Agnes*, and *Ode to Nightingale* : opening of *Hyperion*.—Percy Bysshe Shelley.—*Alastor*, *Revolt of Islam*, the *Cenci*, *Queen Mab*, and Miscellanies.—Extracts from *Sensitive Plant*, *A Ravine*. —His quasi-philosophy condemned.—Barry Cornwall, *Dramatic Scenes*, *Sicilian Story*.—*Marcian Colonna*, and *Songs*—*The Bereaved Lover* ; a *Secluded Dell* ; *The Pauper's Funeral*.—Robert Pollok and Thomas Aird. —*The Course of Time* ; extracts, *Autumn Eve*, *Hill Prospect*.—Aird's imaginative poetry, *The Devil's Dream*.—William Motherwell ; William Kennedy ; Ebenezer Elliot, *Village Patriarch*, and Miscellanies.—Thomas Hood.—*Eugene Aram*, opening of it ; *I remember* ; *Flight of Miss Kilmansegg* ; *Young Ben*, a punning ballad.

THE great original English school of poetry—English in its language, sentiments, style, and subjects—was that commencing with the graphic “*Canterbury Tales*” of Chaucer ; and including Shakspeare, with the constellation of dramatists immediately before and after him—Webster, Marlow, Massinger, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, and Shirley. The second was that of Dryden, Prior, Swift, and Pope, by which the canons of French criticism were acknowledged ; where art superseded nature ; where, even in dramatic compositions, rhyme took the place of blank verse ; and in whose subjects the conventionalities of society held a place superior to the great originating principles of human action. The third great school was that whose merits I have just imperfectly discussed ; and which,

finding our literature at the lowest ebb, succeeded in raising it to a pitch of splendour, whether we look to grace or originality, power or variety—at least nearly equalling the first. Its primal seeds, especially in the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott, seem traceable to Germany: not so in Crabbe, Moore, Southey, Wilson, or Byron; and it ripened into a harvest, whose garnered-up riches are destined for the intellectual provender of many succeeding ages. Fostered in the shadow of its noonday brilliance, and for a time attracting only secondary notice, a fourth school began to exhibit itself about thirty years ago, and since then has been gradually gaining an ascendancy. Somewhat modified since its commencement it may be said to be, that at present existing,—we dare not say flourishing,—seeing what we have seen in that which immediately preceded it, when, verily, there were giants in the land; not influencing merely a class or a coterie, but stirring popular feeling even to its profoundest depths, and enthroning poetry for a season above every other branch of literature. The source of this new composite school was at first very distinctly Italian; next blending itself with the literature of France; and, lastly, with that of Germany. Such has been its influence that, sad it is to say, but little of the flavour of the original British stock is now perceptible among our risen or rising poets.

I do not think we can trace an origin to this school—which soon comprehended among its disciples Keats, Shelley, and Barry Cornwall, with others of less note—farther back than 1816, when it showed itself in full-blown perfection in the “*Story of Rimini*,” by Leigh Hunt—a poem which to this day remains probably the very best exemplar alike of its peculiar beauties and its peculiar faults.

Although previously well known as an acute dramatic critic, and a clever writer of occasional verses, it was by

the production of the "Story of Rimini" that Leigh Hunt put in his successful claim to a place among British poets. That he is himself truly a poet, a man of original and peculiar genius, there can be no possible doubt; but the fountains of inspiration from which his urn drew much light, were Boccaccio, "he of the hundred tales of love;" Dante, in whose "Inferno" is to be found the exquisite episode of "Francesca," which he expanded; and Ariosto, from whose sparkling and sprightly pictures he took many of the gay, bright colours with which he emblazoned his own.

With acute powers of conception, a sparkling and lively fancy, and a quaintly curious felicity of diction, the grand characteristic of Leigh Hunt's poetry is *word-painting*; and in this he is probably without a rival, save in the last and best productions of Keats, who contended, not vainly, with his master on that ground. In this respect, nothing can be more remarkable than some passages in "Rimini," and in his collection entitled "Foliage,"—much of which he has since capriciously cancelled; and he also exercised this peculiar faculty most felicitously in translations from the French and Italian, although, in some instances, he carried it to the amount of grotesqueness or affectation. His heroic couplet has much of the life, strength, and flexibility of Dryden—of whom he often reminds us; and in it he follows glorious John, even to his love for triplets and Alexandrines. Hunt's taste, however, is very capricious; and in his most charming descriptions, some fantastic or incongruous epithet is ever and anon thrust provokingly forward to destroy the unity of illusion, or to mar the metrical harmony. His landscapes are alike vividly coloured and sharply outlined; and his figures, like the quaint antiques of Giotto and Cimabue, are ever placed in attitudes sharp and angular—where striking effect is preferred to natural repose. The finest passages in the "Story of Rimini," are the descriptions of the April

morning with which canto first opens ; of the Ravenna pine-forest, with its “immemorial trees,” in canto second ; and of the garden and summer-house in canto third. Indeed, the whole of the third canto overflows alike with classic elegance and natural feeling ; and it would be difficult anywhere to find, in an English poet, an equal number of consecutive lines so thoroughly excellent. The account of the funeral procession of the lovers, at the conclusion of the poem, is also conceived in a spirit of picturesque beauty, as well as of solemn and deep-toned tenderness :—

“The days were then at close of autumn—still,  
 A little rainy, and towards nightfall chill ;  
 But now there was a moaning air abroad ;  
 And ever and anon, over the road,  
 The last few leaves came fluttering from the trees,  
 Whose trunks, bare, wet, and cold, seemed ill at ease.  
 The people who, from reverence, kept at home,  
 Listened till afternoon to hear them come ;  
 And hour on hour went by, and naught was heard  
 But some chance horseman or the wind that stirred,  
 Till towards the vesper hour ; and then, ’twas said,  
 Some heard a voice that seemed as if it read ;  
 And others said, that they could hear a sound  
 Of many horses trampling the moist ground.  
 Still nothing came : till, on a sudden, just  
 As the wind opened with a rising gust,  
 A voice of chaunting rose, and, as it spread,  
 They plainly heard the anthem for the dead.  
 It was the choristers, who went to meet  
 The train, and now were entering the first street.  
 Then turned aside that city young and old,  
 And in their lifted hands the gushing sorrow rolled.”

Of Leigh Hunt’s other narrative poems—which are all immeasurably inferior to “Rimini”—it is not necessary to say much. “Hero and Leander” is a version of the old classic legend, in his own simple,

earnest, although occasionally mannered style, and with all its peculiar characteristics of quaintness and word-painting. "The Palfrey," a story founded on the antique lay of the minstrel Huon le Roi, is in a lighter and more buoyant strain. "The Feast of the Poets," and "The Feast of the Violets," written with equal gracefulness and spirit, record his critical and candid estimate of the excellencies of those who have recently adorned British poetry, male and female. "Captain Sword and Captain Pen" is a poem denouncing war, and exhibiting some good passages, but written in a rambling measure, which, like a cork floating on a sea-wave, is ever bumping up and down, in sad discordance with the gravity of the subject. Of his miscellaneous pieces, the finest are, "To T. L. H., six years old, during sickness," which overflows with natural pathos; the Oriental morceaux entitled "Mahmoud," and "Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel," full of picturesque yet delicate beauty of thought and language; and several of the translations from the Italian and French; but it cannot be said that Leigh Hunt has quite fulfilled the promise of his early genius. Instead of concentrating his powers, and setting himself indefatigably to the rearing of some great and glorious edifice, combining the poet's invention with the artist's skill, he has contented himself with here a honeysuckle cottage, and there a woodbine grotto. He shunned the solemn and severe, and took to the light and familiar; and has at all times, and on all subjects, been most uncertain and capricious, alike in selection and in handling. With the most perfect sincerity for the time, with a fine genius, and the most cordial dispositions, this infirmity of purpose—as it was with Coleridge—has been his drawback and his bane. With all his diffuseness, with all his occasional languor, and all his provoking conceits, affectations, and mannerisms, it may be proudly claimed for Leigh Hunt that he is

never commonplace; he could not be, if he so desired it; and in his happier passages, he delights by his fine tact, his boyish enthusiasm, his impressive imagery, his genial sociality, his unpretending pathos, and his picturesque detail.

That Leigh Hunt can at will throw off much of his mannerism, the following spirited stanzas sufficiently show:—

“ King Francis was a hearty king, and loved a royal sport,  
 And one day, as his lions fought, sat looking on the court;  
 The nobles filled the benches, and the ladies in their pride,  
 And ’mongst them sat the Count de Lorge, with one for  
     whom he sighed;  
 And truly ’twas a gallant thing to see that crowning show,  
 Valour and Love, and a king above, and the royal beasts  
     below.

Ramped and roared the lions, with horrid laughing jaws;  
 They bit, they glared, gave blows like beams—a wind went  
     with their paws;  
 With wallowing might and stifled roar they rolled on one  
     another,  
 Till all the pit, with sand and mane, was in a thunderous  
     smother;  
 The bloody foam above the bars came whisking through  
     the air;  
 Said Francis then—‘ Faith, gentlemen, we’re better here  
     than there.’

De Lorge’s love o’erheard the king—a beauteous lively  
     dame,  
 With smiling lips and sharp bright eyes, which always  
     seemed the same:  
 She thought, ‘ the Count, my lover, is brave as brave could  
     be;  
 He surely would do wondrous things to show his love  
     for me:  
 King, ladies, lovers, all look on; the occasion is divine;  
 I’ll drop my glove to prove his love—great glory will be  
     mine.’

She dropped her glove to prove his love, then looked at him and smiled ;

He bowed, and in a moment leaped among the lions wild :  
The leap was quick—return was quick—he has regained the place,

Then threw the glove, but not with love, right in the lady's face.

'By heaven !' said Francis, 'rightly done !' and he rose from where he sat—

'No love,' quoth he, 'but vanity, sets love a task like that.'

Schiller's version of this striking anecdote is nearer the original, copied by St Foix from Brantôme ; but Leigh Hunt has certainly improved it in spirit and picturesqueness.

It is very evident that John Keats, the greatest of all our poets who have died in early youth—not excepting Michael Bruce, Kirke White, or Chatterton—imbibed in boyhood a sincere admiration for the poetry of Leigh Hunt, and primarily adopted him as his model in style and diction ; although, ere he ventured before the public, he had considerably altered and modified, or rather extended his views on these matters, by a reverential study of the antique English pastoral poets, Drayton, Spenser, and William Browne—the last of whom he especially followed in the selection of his imagery, and the varied harmony of his numbers. Crude, unsustained, and extravagant as these juvenile attempts in most part are, we have ever and anon indications of a fine original genius. His garden, though unweeded, is full of freshness and fragrance ; the bind-weed strangles the mignonette ; and docks and dandelions half conceal the yellow cowslip and the purple violet ; but we are wooed to this corner by the bud of the moss-rose, and to that by the double wallflower. We feel it to be a wilderness ; but it is a wilderness of many sweets. I allude here more particularly to his first little volume, published in 1817,



with a head of Spenser on the title-page, and dedicated to Leigh Hunt.

Images of majesty and beauty continued to crowd on the imagination of the young poet; but either his taste in selection was deficient, or he shrank from the requisite labour; and in the following year appeared his "Endymion," a poetic romance. It would be difficult to point out anywhere a work more remarkable for its amount of beauties and blemishes, inextricably intertwined. Its mythology is Greek, and its imagery the sylvan-pastoral—reminding us now of the pine-flavoured Idyllia of Theocritus, and now of the "bosky bournes and bushy dells" of Milton's "Comus." Preparatory to its composition, he had saturated his mind with the "leafy luxury" of our early dramatists; and we have many reflections of the rural beauty and repose pervading "The Faithful Shepherdess" of Fletcher, and "The Sad Shepherd" of Ben Jonson; as well as of the early Milton of the "Arcades" and "Lycidas." We are entranced with the prodigal profusion of imagery, and the exquisite variety of metres sweeping along with an Æolian harmony, at once so refined and yet seemingly so inartificial. All is, however, a wild luxurious revel merely, where Imagination laughs at Taste, and bids defiance to Judgment and Reason. There is no discrimination, no selection—even the very rhymes seem sometimes to have suggested the thoughts that follow; and whatever comes uppermost comes out, provided it be florid, gorgeous, or glittering. The work is a perfect mosaic of bright tints and graceful forms, despotically commingled, almost without regard to plan or congruity; so that we often lose the thin thread of story altogether in the fantastic exuberance of ornament and decoration. Ever and anon, however, we come to bits of exquisite beauty—patches of deep, serene blue sky, amid the rolling clouds, which compel us to pause in admir-

ation—glimpses of nature full of tenderness and truth—touches of sentiment deep as they are delicate. His opening line, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," conveys a fine philosophic sentiment, and is the keynote to the whole body of his poetry. Crude, unequal, extravagant, nay, absurd as he sometimes is—for there is scarcely an isolated page in "Endymion" to which one or more of these harsh epithets may not in some degree be justly applied—yet, on the other hand, it would be difficult to point out any twenty lines in sequence unredeemed by some happy turn of thought, some bright image, or some eloquent expression.

That all this was the result of imaginative wealth and youthful inexperience, is demonstrated by the last poems John Keats was permitted to give the world, and which are as rich, but much more select, in imagery, purer in taste, and more fastidious in diction, as well as more felicitous and artistic. He had found out that, to keep interest alive, it was necessary to deal less with the shadowy, the remote, and the abstract; and that, without losing in dignity, he might descend more to the thoughts and feelings—nay, even to the ways, and habits, and language of actual life. From the pure mythological of "Endymion" he attempted a blending of the real with the supernatural in "Lamia," and exactly with the degree of success which might, in the management of such elements, have been expected from him. "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil," his version of Boccaccio's exquisite little story, is much less questionable. We have therein character and incident as well as description; and to these the last is made subordinate. We there also see, for the first time, that instead of playing with his theme, he has set himself in earnest to grapple with it. The composition is more elaborate, and we have a selection of thoughts and images instead of the indiscriminate pouring forth of all. The faults of affectation and

quaintness, although not entirely got rid of, are there less glaring and offensive ; and along with the mere garniture of fancy, we have a story of human interest, of love and revenge and suffering, well though peculiarly told. In this poem he wonderfully triumphed over his earlier besetting frailties—want of precision and carelessness of style—and exhibited such rapid strides of improvement, as enable us to form some probable estimate of what his genius might have achieved, had he been destined to reach maturer years.

His two latest were also his two most perfect compositions, yet completely opposite in their character—“The Eve of St Agnes,” of the most florid Gothic, remarkable for its sensuous beauty ; and “Hyperion,” a fragment equally remarkable for its Greek severity and antique solemnity of outline. To the same latest period of his strangely fevered and brief career—for he died at twenty-four—are referable the four exquisite odes, “To a Nightingale,” “To a Grecian Urn,” “To Melancholy,” and “To Autumn,”—all so pregnant with deep thought, so picturesque in their limning, and so suggestive.

Let us take three stanzas from “The Eve of St Agnes.” They describe Madeline at her devotions before lying down to sleep on that charmed night. She has just entered her chamber, when—

“ Out went the taper as she hurried in ;  
 Its little smoke in pallid moonshine died ;  
 She closed the door, she panted, all akin  
 To spirits of the air and visions wide ;  
 No uttered syllable, or, woe betide !  
 But to her heart her heart was voluble,  
 Paining with eloquence her balmy side ;  
 As though a tongueless nightingale should swell  
 Her throat in vain and die, heart-stifled in her cell.

A casement high and triple-arched there was,  
 All garlanded with carven imageries

Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device  
 Innumerable, of stains and splendid dyes,  
 As are the tiger-moth's deep damasked wings;  
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
 A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
 As down she knelt in Heaven's grace and boon;  
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,  
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
 And on her hair a glory like a saint;  
 She seemed a splendid angel newly drest,  
 Save wings, for heaven; Porphyro grew faint,  
 She knelt so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint."

We have here a specimen of descriptive power luxuriously rich and original; but the following lines, from the "Ode to a Nightingale," flow from a far more profound fountain of inspiration. After addressing the bird as a

"light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
 In some melodious plot  
 Of beechen green and shadows numberless,  
 Singing of summer in full-throated ease,"

he adds, somewhat fantastically, it must be owned, at first—

"Oh, for a beaker full of the warm south,  
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
 And purple-stained mouth,  
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget,  
 What thou amongst the leaves hast never known,  
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret,  
 Here, where men sit, and hear each other groan;

Where Palsy shakes a few sad last grey hairs,  
 Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies;  
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow,  
     And leaden-eyed despairs;  
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
     In ancient days by emperor and clown;  
 Perhaps the self-same song, that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
     The same that oft-times hath  
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a spell  
 To toll one back from thee to my sole self!  
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
     As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.  
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintiff anthem fades  
 Past the near meadow, over the hill stream,  
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
     In the next valley's glades:  
 Was it a vision or a waking dream?  
 Fled is that music;—do I wake or sleep?"

In his earlier pieces Keats was too extramundane—too fond of the visionary. His fancy and feelings rioted in a sort of sun-coloured cloudland, where all was gorgeous and glowing, rose-tinctured or thunderous; but ever most indistinct, and often incomprehensible, save when regarded as dream-like imaginings—the morning reveries of a young enthusiast. His genius, however, was gradually coming under the control of judgment; his powers of conception and of expression were alike maturing; and his heart was day by day expanding to the genial influences of healthy simple nature. A large

portion of what he has left behind is crude, unconcocted, and unsatisfactory, exhibiting rather poetical materials than poetical superstructure; but his happier strains vindicate the presence of a great poet in something more than embryo. Which of our acknowledged mag-nates, if cut off at the same age, would have left so much really excellent? Altogether, whether we regard his short fevered life, or the quality of his genius, John Keats was assuredly one of the most remarkable men in the range of our poetical literature; nor, while taste and sensibility remain in the world, can ever his prediction of his own fate be verified, when he dictated his epitaph as that of one "whose name was written in water."

As an example of Keats' severer manner, I give the magnificent portrait of Saturn, with which "Hyperion" opens. In the same fragment we find several other passages equally grand and solemn.

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
 Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
 Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star,  
 Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
 Still as the silence round about his lair;  
 Forest on forest hung about his head  
 Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
 Not so much life as on a summer's day  
 Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
 But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.  
 A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more  
 By reason of his fallen divinity  
 Spreading a shade: the Naiad 'mid her reeds  
 Pressed her cold finger closer to her lips.

Along the margin-sand large foot-marks went,  
 No further than to where his feet had strayed,  
 And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground  
 His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,  
 Unsceptred; and his realmless eyes were closed;  
 While his bowed head seemed listening to the earth,  
 His ancient mother, for some comfort yet."

Almost at the identical time with John Keats, two other poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Bryan Waller Proctor, better known as Barry Cornwall, appeared before the world. Shelley took to the bare uplands of imaginative philosophy; Cornwall, less ambitiously, chose the flowery valleys of fancy and feeling.

The subject of "Alastor," Shelley's earliest acknowledged poem, and one of his best, is, like that of Wordsworth's "Prelude," the development of a poet's mind, but much more vaguely and indefinitely brought before us. Even in this youthful production we have much of the mastery of diction, the picturesqueness of description, and the majestic imaginative gorgeousness or grace for which his maturer writings were distinguished. Its general aim is visionary and obscure, unless it may be found in a search after ideal perfection—some unapproachable and unattainable good—some Utopia of the imagination. Equally peculiar in thought, style, and invention, and even less attractive than "Alastor," from the absence of human interest—however higher as a literary effort—was the allegorical poem, entitled "The Revolt of Islam." It was an unhappy attempt to blend poetry with metaphysics;—unhappy, as in it the former has been almost sacrificed to the latter, and much fine thought and imagery thus literally entombed. He is anything but lucid or happy in the management of the plot or the arrangement of the incidents; but where it escapes from its so-called philosophy, which, when comprehensible, is utterly weak and worthless, the poem exhibits various passages remarkable for high imaginative passionate earnestness, or picturesque beauty; while some of its narrative portions are of almost equal excellence, as the early loves of Laon and Cythna—the portrait of the tyrant Othman sitting alone, with the little child in his palace hall—and the river voyage, towards the conclusion of the last canto.

The next production of this wayward, misguided, and

singular man was his tragedy of "The Cenci,"—in subject, sufficiently indicative of the morbid perversion of his taste—in execution, the most able and elaborate of all his writings. Not only in exquisite description, but in dramatic energy, it may stand comparison with almost anything recent times have produced; but these excellencies are rendered literally nugatory, from the repulsive horror with which its successive scenes are approached. To the intellectual sublime, it is what the Newgate Calendar is to the moral sublime; and because sheer monstrosities have been depicted, nay, minutely dwelt on in the grosser writings of former ages, it seems to have been thought that no apology was necessary for transferring them to our own. In the "Œdipus Tyrannus" of Sophocles to be sure, in the "Hippolytus" of Euripides, in the "Bride of Messina" of Schiller, in the "Mirra" of Alfieri, in the "Manfred" and "Parisina" of Byron, and in one or two of our early dramatists, the same dangerous tract of thought has been glimpsed upon; but surely these are only as lurid beacons to warn right feeling and tasteful propriety from such a bleak and forbidding territory. No man can plead any better apology for the use of such machinery, for the purpose of exciting the tragic emotions of pity or terror, than he could, were he to exhibit the rack and guillotine on the stage, and to describe all the horrible minutiae of inquisitorial torture. Except for the diseased state of Shelley's temperament, such things could not possibly have been, even with him—for he also possessed feelings at times apparently totally in opposition to these; and I can quite agree with Mr Leigh Hunt, when he says of this same tragedy, that—"Otherwise besides grandeur and terror, there are things in it lovely as heart can worship; and the author showed himself able to draw both men and women, whose names would have become 'familiar in our mouths as household words.' The utmost might of gentleness, and of the sweet habitudes



of domestic affection, was never more balmily impressed through the tears of the reader, than in the unique and divine close of that dreadful tragedy. Its loveliness, being that of the highest reason, is superior to the madness of all the crime that has preceded it, and leaves nature in a state of reconciliation with her ordinary course."

With much of the beautiful and true—with much of animation and force of passion, and fine touches of nature and picturesque description, the eclogue of "Rosalind and Helen" has the same detracting qualities of the perverted in taste and the repulsive as well the extravagant in incident.

The "Prometheus Unbound," a lyrical drama in four acts, was intended, as we are told by Shelley himself, to make his hero "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends." It hence differs from the lost drama of Æschylus on the same subject, whose purpose was merely to commemorate the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim, on his disclosing the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis. With much of the simple and severe Greek spirit, and with several splendid soliloquies, descriptions, and lyrical effervescences, it is, for the most part, unsubstantial and wire-drawn, and to me as unintelligible as not a few of the superlatively metaphysical reveries of Plato, Kant, and Coleridge, of which last amiable dreamer, Southey, judging from his own experiences, not unaptly says, in writing to a philosophical inquirer, "If you can get at the kernel of his 'Friend,' and his 'Aids to Reflection,' you may crack peach-stones without any fear of cracking your teeth." We have shadows of power, rather than power itself—little that is real or tangible, or appertaining either to the beauty or majesty of physical nature; nothing to touch our hearts, or awaken our

sympathies. All is mystic, ideal, involved, remote, cloudy, or abstract. We have the sun, but it is hid in rolling vapours—we have the moon, but it shines only on glittering snow. So recondite does Shelley sometimes become, that even language itself, of which he was one of the greatest masters—greater, perhaps, than even Thomas de Quincey—occasionally breaks down under him; and his diction, from being smooth, and pearly, and transparent, gets harsh, perplexed, misty, or meaningless; as if, in his attempts to make his style Orphic and primeval, he passed, even in words, beyond the boundaries of creation and sunshine, into “Chaos and old Night.” He is, assuredly, the most ethereal of all our poets, alike in imagery and language; his imagery dealing principally with elemental nature, while his language, in delicate tenuity, seems almost fitted to describe dissolving views, as they “come like shadows, so depart.”

The other larger productions of Shelley, his “Queen Mab,” his “Adonais,” his “Hellas,” his “Witch of Atlas,” and his “Julian and Maddalo,” are all more or less characterised by the same beauties and defects; and these defects, in my opinion, unfitted him for ever successfully overcoming the difficulties of a long poem. Even now, he is principally remembered by his lesser works—his “Sensitive Plant,” his “Skylark,” his “Cloud,” his “Marianne’s Dream,” his lines “To a Lady with a Guitar,” his “Stanzas written in dejection at Naples,” and his “Lines to an Indian Air;” and it has been well said of him, that “he has single thoughts of great depth and force, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness; and that in his smaller pieces, where he has attempted little, he has done most.” It would be difficult to excel several isolated stanzas in the “Address to the Skylark;” but “The Sensitive Plant” and “The Cloud” are, in my opinion, by far the most exquisite and original of all his conceptions: they approach, as nearly as possible,

to what has been somewhat quaintly denominated “pure poetry;” and are as unique, in their wild ethereal beauty, as the “Kilmeny” of Hogg, or “The Ancient Marinere” of Coleridge.

I am aware, that quoting a few stanzas from the “Sensitive Plant” can only call to mind the pedant in the *Facetiae* of Hierocles, who carried about a brick with him in the market-place, as a specimen of the building he had for sale. But we venture on it, and take part of the catalogue of flowers.

“A sensitive plant in a garden grew,  
And the young winds fed it with silver dew;  
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light,  
And closed them beneath the kisses of night.

And the spring arose on the garden fair,  
Like the spirit of love felt everywhere.  
And each flower and herb on earth’s dark breast,  
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

The snow-drop, and then the violet  
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet,  
And their breath was mixed with fresh odour sent  
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.

Then the pied wind-flowers, and the tulip tall,  
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,  
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream’s recess,  
Till they die of their own dear loveliness;

And the Naiad-like lily of the vale,  
Whom youth makes so fair, and passion so pale,  
That the light of its tremulous bells is seen  
Through their pavilions of tender green;

And the hyacinth purple, and white, and blue,  
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew  
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,  
It was felt like an odour within the sense;

And the rose, like a nymph to the bath address,  
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,  
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air  
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare;

And the wand-like lily, which lifted up,  
 As a Mœnad, its moonlight coloured cup,  
 Till the fiery star, which is its eye,  
 Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky ;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tuberose,  
 The sweetest flower for scent that blows ;  
 And all rare blossoms, from every clime,  
 Grew in that garden in perfect prime."

So much for his taste in the delicate and refined of description : now for his power in the stern and severe :—

" I remember

Two miles on this side of the fort, the road  
 Crosses a deep ravine ; 'tis rough and narrow,  
 And winds with short turns down the precipice ;  
 And in its depth there is a mighty rock,  
 Which has, from unimaginable years,  
 Sustained itself with terror and with toil  
 Over a gulf, and with the agony  
 With which it clings seems slowly coming down ;  
 Even as a wretched soul, hour after hour,  
 Clings to the mass of life ; yet clinging, leans,  
 And, leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss  
 In which it fears to fall. Beneath this crag,  
 Huge as despair, as if in weariness  
 The melancholy mountain yawns. Below  
 You hear, but see not, the impetuous torrent  
 Raging among the caverns ; and a bridge  
 Crosses the chasm ; and high above these grow,  
 With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,  
 Cedars and yews and pines, whose tangled hair  
 Is matted in one solid roof of shade  
 By the dark ivy's twine. At noonday here  
 'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night."

Such were Shelley's powers, when legitimately directed ; but unfortunately it is rarely that he thus writes ; and a much higher place has been claimed for the great mass of his verse than it seems to me to be at

all entitled to. Gorgeous, graceful, and subtle qualities it indeed invariably possesses—and no one can be more ready to admit them than I am; but he had only a section of the essential properties necessary to constitute a master in the art. The finest poetry is that (whatever critical coteries may assert to the contrary, and it is exactly the same with painting and sculpture) which is most patent to the general understanding, and hence to the approval or disapproval of the common sense of mankind. We have only to try the productions of Shakspeare, of Milton, of Dryden, of Pope, of Gray and Collins, of Scott, Burns, Campbell, and Byron—indeed, of any truly great writer whatever in any language, by this standard—to be convinced that such must be the case. Verse that will not stand being read aloud before a jury of common-sense men, is,—and you may rely upon the test—wanting in some great essential quality. It is here that the bulk of the poetry of Shelley—and not of him only, but of most of those who have succeeded him in his track as poets—is, when weighed in the balance, found wanting. And why? Because these writers have left the highways of truth and nature, and, seeking the by-lanes, have there, mistaking the uncommon for the valuable, bowed down to the idols of affectation and false taste.

I make this remark here, because I think that Shelley had much to do in the indoctrinating of those principles which have mainly guided our poetical aspirants of late years—sadly to their own disadvantage and the public disappointment. Shelley was undoubtedly a man of genius—of very high genius—but of a peculiar and unhealthy kind. It is needless to disguise the fact, and it accounts for all—his mind was diseased: he never knew, even from boyhood, what it was to breathe the atmosphere of healthy life, to have the *mens sana in corpore sano*. His sensibilities were over acute; his morality was thoroughly morbid; his meta-

physical speculations illogical, incongruous, incomprehensible—alike baseless and objectless. The suns and systems of his universe were mere nebulæ; his continents were a chaos of dead matter; his oceans “a world of waters, and without a shore.” For the law of gravitation—that law which was to preserve the planets in their courses—he substituted some undemonstrable dream-like reflection of a dream, which he termed intellectual beauty. Life, according to him, was a phantasmagorical pictured vision—mere colours on the sunset clouds; and earth a globe hung on nothing—self-governing, yet, strange to say, without laws. It is gratuitous absurdity to call his mystical speculations a search after truth; they are no such thing; and are as little worth the attention of reasoning and responsible man as the heterogeneous reveries of nightmare. They are a mere flaring up in the face of all that Revelation has mercifully disclosed, and all that sober Reason has confirmed. Shelley’s faith was a pure psychological negation, and cannot be confuted, simply because it asserts nothing; and, under the childish idea that all the crime, guilt, and misery of the world resulted from—what?—not the depravity of individuals, but from the very means, civil and ecclesiastical, by which these, in all ages and nations, have been at least attempted to be controlled, he seemed to take an insane delight in selecting, for poetical illustration, subjects utterly loathsome and repulsive; and which religion and morality, the virtuous and the pure, the whole natural heart and spirit of upright man, either rises up in rebellion against, or shrinks back from instinctively, and with horror.

The poetry of Barry Cornwall is of a much less ambitious, but far more genial character than that of Shelley; it clings only to what is loveable in our nature, and hence approximates by at least one-half nearer to that of Hunt and Keats. But, like every

true poet, however he may be influenced by the lights from without reflected on him, he has a path of his own ; and his verse is characterised by definite and distinctive features. His chief models in thought and in tone of feeling, as well as in viewing and describing objects, seem to have been the early Italian writers, more especially Boccaccio with his naïve narrative simplicity ; and our older dramatists, Fletcher, Massinger, and Ben Jonson, in their tender and gentler moods, and in their lyrical measures quaintly natural, or fantastically pathetic. Nor are indications of the impressions made on him by his contemporaries, Wordsworth, Byron, and Coleridge, quite undiscoverable. For the recondite variations and the exquisite melody of his rhymes and metres, Barry Cornwall has been seldom equalled. We are carried away as it were by the song of the Syrens, or of old Timotheus ; and hence it is, that he is one of the very few authors who, by adapting his tone to the chronology and nature of his subjects, reconciles us, “by the consecration and the poet’s dream,” to the substitution of pictures, Elysian in their softness and harmony, for actual representations of human life. Wood, water, sky, and ocean, all are invested with the glowing colours of romance ; and human life, under his touch, becomes but a panoramic pageantry of love and beauty, of heroism and gentleness ; of sympathetic sorrow and angelic resignation. Almost all his delineations relate either to the mythological eras, or to the chivalrous and romantic ; and in him a taint of mannerism and quaintness seems not only pardonable, but graceful and becoming ; being to his themes as congenial as the wild flavour of heather to mountain honey.

“The Dramatic Scenes,” his earliest, is in several respects still his best work ; for they were evident overflowings from his feelings and fancy, and are written *con amore*. Besides this, they had the charm of novelty,

and bewitched all finer sensibilities by being so thoroughly tintured with "Elysian beauty, melancholy grace." Rich and ornate—nay, almost arabesque—as the language of these dialogues may be said to be, we somehow or other tacitly acquiesce in its dramatic fitness; and, although aware of being lulled into a kind of half-dream, would rather not be awakened out of it. The three finest are "The Way to Conquer," "The Two Dreams," and far before either of these, "The Broken Heart," which combines all the richness of an autumnal moonlight with all the softness of a morning reverie; and which, in tender pathos, was never excelled even by Massinger himself.

Nor far behind "The Dramatic Scenes," in the characteristics of gentle but passionate earnestness, of refined sentiment, of picturesque situation, and exquisite harmony of style, are the "Sicilian Story," "Marcian Colonna," and the serious portion of "Diego de Montilla;" for wit and humour, whatever he may himself think, lie not in our author's way. It is thus that he outlines the sequestration of a bereaved lover—

" He lived in solitude,  
 And scarcely quitted his ancestral home.  
 Though many a friend, and many a lady woo'd,  
 Of birth and beauty, yet he would not roam  
 Beyond the neighbouring hamlet's churchyard rude;  
 And there the stranger still on one low tomb  
 May read 'Aurora;' whether the name he drew  
 From mere conceit of grief, or not, none knew.

Perhaps 'twas a mere memorial of the past;  
 Such Love and Sorrow fashion, and deceive  
 Themselves with words, until they grow at last  
 Content with mocks alone, and cease to grieve;  
 Such madness in its wiser mood will cast,  
 Making its fond credulity believe  
 Things unsubstantial. 'Twas—no matter what—  
 Something to hallow that lone burial spot.



He grew familiar with the bird, the brute  
 Knew well its benefactor; and he'd feed  
 And make acquaintance with the fishes mute;  
 And, like the Thracian Shepherd, as we read,  
 Drew with the music of his stringed lute  
 Behind him winged things, and many a tread  
 And tramp of animal; and, in his hall,  
 He was a Lord indeed, beloved by all.

In a high solitary turret, where  
 None were admitted, would he muse, when first  
 The young day broke; perhaps because he there  
 Had in his early infancy been nursed,  
 Or that he felt more pure the morning air,  
 Or loved to see the Great Apollo burst  
 From out his cloudy bondage, and the night  
 Hurry away before the conquering light.

But oftener to a gentle lake, that lay  
 Cradled within a forest's bosom, he  
 Would, shunning kind reproaches, steal away;  
 And, when the inland breeze was fresh and free,  
 There would he loiter all the livelong day,  
 Tossing upon the waters listlessly.  
 The swallow dashed beside him, and the deer  
 Drank by his boat, and eyed him without fear.

It was a soothing place: the summer hours  
 Passed there in quiet beauty, and at night  
 The moon ran searching by the woodbine bowers,  
 And shook o'er all the leaves her kisses bright,  
 O'er lemon blossoms and faint myrtle flowers;  
 And there the west wind often took its flight,  
 While heaven's clear eye was closing; while above,  
 Pale Hesper rose, the evening light of love.

. . . . .

'Twas solitude he loved where'er he strayed,—  
 No danger daunted, and no pastime drew,  
 And ever on that fair heart-broken maid,  
 (Aurora,) who unto the angels flew

Away so early, with grief unallayed

He thought ; and in the sky's eternal blue  
Would look for shapes, till at times before him she  
Rose like a beautiful reality."

Having given from Shelley a landscape sketch of secluded grandeur and magnificence, as indicative of that poet's habits of thought and peculiar manner, I add the following by Barry Cornwall—not by way of contrast, but as a companion picture. The place described had been a scene of murder.

"It was a spot like those romancers paint,  
Or painted, when of dusky knights they told,  
Wandering about in forests old,

When the last purple colour was waxing faint,  
And day was dying in the west ; the trees  
(Dark pine, and chestnut, and the dwarfed oak,  
And cedar,) shook their branches, till the shade  
Looked like a spirit, and living, as it played,  
Seemed holding dim communion with the breeze :  
Below, a tumbling river rolled along,  
(Its course by lava rocks and branches broke,)  
Singing for aye its fierce and noisy song."

Nor can I resist quoting the three following exquisite stanzas as a specimen of Barry Cornwall's very best manner—they are from his poem of "Gyges."

"It is a chilling thing to see, as I  
Have seen—a man go down into the grave  
Without a tear, or even an altered eye :  
Oh ! sadder far than when fond women rave,  
Or children weep, or aged parents sigh,  
O'er one whom art and love doth strive to save  
In vain : man's heart is soothed by every tone  
Of pity, saying, 'he's not quite alone.'

I saw a pauper once, when I was young,  
Borne to his shallow grave : the bearers trod  
Smiling to where the death-bell heavily rung ;  
And soon his bones were laid beneath the sod :

On the rough boards the earth was gaily flung ;  
 Methought the prayer which gave him to his God  
 Was coldly said ;—then all, passing away,  
 Left the scarce confined wretch to quick decay.

It was an autumn evening, and the rain  
 Had ceased awhile, but the loud winds did shriek,  
 And called the deluging tempest back again ;  
 The flag-staff on the churchyard tower did creak,  
 And through the black clouds ran a lightning vein.  
 And then the flapping raven came to seek  
 Its home : its flight was heavy, and its wing  
 Seemed weary with a long day's wandering."

During the last quarter of a century—(alas ! for Mr Proctor, and parchments, writs, and affidavits !)—Barry Cornwall has only come before the public in short snatches of song—"Sybilline Leaves," scattered through many tomes, where they have wooed and won their way to the thoughtful hearts of many a wintry hearth ; and some of them wed to music, as "The Sea," "King Death," and "The Stormy Petrel," have attained a popular acceptance scarcely excelled by Moore and Haynes Bayley. Yet, confessedly fine as many of these latter lyrical effusions are, they have for the most part an air of unnatural buoyancy and fantastic jauntiness about them, scarcely quite pleasing or satisfactory, and do not appear to me entitled to rank in excellence with "The Dream," with "Marcellia," "The Sleeping Figure of Modena," and many other of the same author's earlier productions.

The precis of this poet's character by Lord Jeffrey I regard as so just and perfect, that I cannot resist quoting it ; more especially as, of late years, there seems to have arisen some unaccountable but futile tendency to under-rate him, for the sake of the glorification of others, unquestionably not more deserving.

"If it be the peculiar province of poetry to give delight," says that eloquent critic, "this author should

rank very high among our poets; and in spite of his neglect of the terrible passions, he does rank very high in our estimation. He has a beautiful fancy and a beautiful diction, and a fine ear for the music of verse, and great tenderness and delicacy of feeling. He seems, moreover, to be altogether free from any tincture of bitterness, rancour, or jealousy; and never shocks us with atrocity, or stiffens us with horror, or confounds us with the dreadful sublimities of demoniacal energy. His soul, on the contrary, seems filled to overflowing with images of love and beauty, and gentle sorrows, and tender pity, and mild and holy resignation. The character of his poetry is to soothe and melt and delight; to make us kind and thoughtful and imaginative; to purge away the dregs of our earthly passions by the refining fires of a pure imagination; and to lap us up from the eating cares of life, in visions so soft and bright as to sink like morning dreams on our senses, and at the same time so distinct, and truly fashioned upon the eternal patterns of nature, as to hold their place before our eyes long after they have again been opened on the dimmer scenes of the world."

To this I would only add, that if one of the surest tests of fine poetry—and I know no better—be that of impressing the heart and fancy, Barry Cornwall must rank high; for there are few to whose pages the young and ardent reader would more frequently and fondly recur, or which so tenderly impress themselves on the tablets of memory.

Almost totally opposed in style, manner, and subject, to the four poets I have last mentioned, are the two that next follow—Pollok and Aird. The former has gained a popularity far beyond what even his most sanguine admirers could have ventured to anticipate; the latter most assuredly less than his high genius entitles him to. Much, however, is to be referred to the class of subjects that each has chosen to illustrate.

The air we have been breathing in the writings of Hunt, Keats, Cornwall, and Shelley, can scarcely be said to appertain to Britain. Their skies have a deep Ausonian blue, and are not vaporous and clouded; their breezes, instead of being scented by the mountain heather, are redolent of myrtle flowers and orange groves. All their associations are with the sunny south—those of Aird and Pollok with the hardy north; and between them there is not a wider contrast than between the imperial purple robes of Rome, and the plain black cloak of Geneva.

Aird and Pollok were personal friends, and, I believe, fellow-students; and their appearance in the literary world was nearly about the same time—Aird, in his "Religious Characteristics," Pollok in his "Course of Time"—both of which remarkable works I delight to remember having had the privilege of perusing in manuscript.

Shunning companionship, and collating, combining, and nursing his thoughts in rural seclusion, Pollok seemed determinedly to have braced up his mind for one grand literary enterprise which was to signalise his life. Whatever he heard, or read, or saw, or felt, or imagined, was worked up into his materials. It occupied his entire man by day, and coloured his very dreams by night. He approached his work on his knees by prayer; he addressed himself to it as an exercise of devotion. Nor was the product unworthy. "The Course of Time" is a very extraordinary poem—vast in its conception—vast in its plan—vast in its materials,—and vast, if very far from perfect, in its achievement. The wonderful thing is, indeed, that it is such as we find it, and not that its imperfections are numerous. It has nothing at all savouring of the little or conventional about it—for he passed at once from the merely elegant and graceful. With Young, Blair, and Cowper for his guides, his muse strove with unwearied

wing to attain the high, severe, serene region of Milton ; and he was at least successful in earnestness of purpose, in solemnity of tone, and in vigour and variety of illustration.

To briefly characterise "The Course of Time" would be no easy matter, as, in a literary point of view, it has so many points of conceptional excellence united to so many imperfections in mere style and execution ; but I hesitate not to affirm, that the latter are in a great measure absorbed, and disappear or dwindle away, in the vastness of the general design, and in the copious splendour of particular passages. Pollok was of an enthusiastic temperament. He combined an energetic intellect with a vivid imagination ; and these qualities were exhibited alike in the daring plan and the laborious execution of his great poem ; for unquestionably, by the united consent alike of Europe and America, it is entitled to that appellation. Had it been otherwise, it must have been a complete failure ; for he ambitiously sought an etherealised region, which "no trite medium knows," and where the waxen wings of a Dædalus would have instantly betrayed an unauthorised adventurer. Regarded as a mere poem—as a mere literary performance, in which the objects of nature and art are beautified by the heightening glow of imagination—I do not think that it is entitled to rank by any means so high as its general acceptance would entitle us to look for ; but, on the contrary, that very popularity, when we consider the class of its readers and their number, is a sufficient evidence of power of some kind—probably of a lofty kind. Many of its passages, it must be admitted, are more rhetorical than inspired. We are oftener dazzled than delighted ; and if we at one time wonder at the amazing copiousness of Pollok's imagery, we are at another chagrined at the indifferent taste manifested in its selection. Nor can more be said in uniform defence of its language, style,

or intonation, although these occasionally sound like echoes of Milton and Wordsworth—of the former in a solemn music, imitative of the peal of the organ, and the voices of the choir, reverberating among carved cathedral roofs; of the latter, in strange wild natural cadences—now like the mountain breezes wailing dirgeful through the dark ravines of the mountains, or the hollow caves on the sea-shore,—and now of the soft light airs dallying in April, with the greening tree-tops. In the celestial part of his subject—in his allusions to the glories of heaven, and the transient vanities of earth, the poet is necessarily—I say necessarily—indebted for much that has been gleaned unequivocally from the sacred record. But he is not less felicitous in the pictures of weal or woe drawn from his own observation of actual life—some of which, as those of a sister’s death-bed, and of the anxious mother with her children around her, are tinted with a touching beauty; while others, as those of the groping miser, and the midnight thief, and the satiated voluptuary, are stamped with a stern truth, a severe reality, and a harrowing power. His descriptive talent, although not always judiciously exercised, was of a high grade. Let me instance two sketches. The first speaks for itself, and in his softer manner:—

“ It was an eve of Autumn’s holiest mood ;  
 The corn-fields, bathed in Cynthia’s silver light,  
 Stood ready for the reaper’s gathering hand ;  
 And all the winds slept soundly. Nature seemed  
 In silent contemplation to adore  
 Its Maker. Now and then the aged leaf  
 Fell from its fellows, rustling to the ground ;  
 And, as it fell, bade man think on his end.  
 On vale and lake, on wood and mountain high,  
 With pensive wing outspread, sat heavenly Thought,  
 Conversing with itself. Vesper looked forth  
 From out her western hermitage, and smiled ;

And up the east, unclouded, rode the moon,  
 With all her stars, gazing on earth intense,  
 As if she saw some wonder working there."

The last line, by its suggestiveness, raises the passage far beyond the scope of mere description. Passing from the gentle to the majestic, here is a picture of another stamp:—

"Nor is the hour of lonely walk forgot  
 In the wide desert, where the view was large.  
 Pleasant were many scenes, but most to me  
 The solitude of vast extent, untouched  
 By hand of art, where Nature sowed, herself,  
 And reaped her crops; whose garments were the clouds;  
 Whose minstrels brooks; whose lamps the moon and stars;  
 Whose organ-choir the voice of many waters;  
 Whose banquets morning dews; whose heroes storms;  
 Whose warriors mighty winds; whose lovers flowers;  
 Whose orators the thunderbolts of God;  
 Whose palaces the everlasting hills;  
 Whose ceiling heaven's unfathomable blue;  
 And from whose rocky turrets, battled high,  
 Prospect immense spread out on all sides round,  
 Lost now beneath the welkin and the main,  
 Now walled with hills that slept above the storms."

It was finely said, I believe, by my friend Thomas Aird, that "'The Course of Time' was the work of a man who had kept himself shy from literature, for a first and great attempt." Pity that it should have been his last; for, unquestionably, it is the production of a great and original genius—a genius which, whatever were its youthful deficiencies of taste and judgment, has made itself felt wherever the English language is spoken.

Poor Pollok gave his manuscript to the press from a dying hand. That manuscript, as I have said, I had at the time the melancholy pleasure of perusing, and remember well that several of the books had been copied over for him by a female hand, on account of his



increasing debility—a symptom which he vainly tried, even to the last, to conceal from himself. On the 24th March 1827, “The Course of Time” was given to the world ; and, on the 18th September of the same year, its author was removed from it. But not only had he not lived in vain—the great object of his life had been accomplished in the publication of his poem ; and it is pleasant to know, that the news of the success of “The Course of Time” shed a sunshine around his early death-bed. He was in his twenty-ninth year.

The poetry of Thomas Aird deals, still more exclusively than that of Pollok, with two grand elements—the majestic and the severely simple. His genius pants after “the vast alone, the wonderful, the wild ;” and leaves to others the sighing after “harmony and grace, and gentlest beauty.” From their deficiency in the genial and the ornate, his writings have thus unfortunately failed in acquiring that more general acceptability which their merits otherwise deserve. His mind seems too stately and austere to descend to trifling, with the winning ease of a Prior or a Moore ; and he cannot be said to be himself—to be in his element, except when dealing with the majestic in form and idea. The pervading fault of his compositions will be felt to lie in the circumstance of his being often less in than above or beyond his subject, which he keeps aloof from, and regards as much with the eye of a painter as of a poet : thus, in a great measure, excluding it from that sympathy which can only be engendered by the complete identification of the author’s mind with his productions. Occasionally his conceptions seem vague, and wrapt in a dreamy perplexity, and his language gnarled and involved ; but we have ever the feeling of strength and healthy vigour—never of poverty or meanness. His muse shrinks from the commonplace ; and its song is never like an unhappy stream whimpering beside the polluting chimneys of a manufacturing town ; but

resembles the fresh forceful cataract dashing in diamonds over the mountain rock with its scattered birch-trees, and thundering on in its way downwards, although that may be only to a bleak and sequestered pastoral glen.

Aird has seldom ventured on depicting modes of life, or the varying many-hued manners of society—and rightly; for the path of his vigour lies in a different direction—in grand outline, not in detail. He is hence less fortunate in his “Captive of Fez,” his “Christian Bride,” and his “Frank Sylvan;” although the first has much of the stately march of Dryden’s narrative, and the last of the quaint graphic homeliness of Cowper, than in his more purely imaginative efforts, “The Demoniac,” “Nebuchadnessar,” some scenes in the “Tragedy of Wold,” “The Churchyard Ghosts,” and “The Devil’s Dream;” the last of which especially, for grandeur of conception and the magnificent imagery of particular passages, is scarcely surpassed by anything that I know of in modern poetry.

It is thus that the arch-fiend is introduced to us:—

“Beyond the north, where Ural hills from polar tempests run,  
A glow went forth at midnight hour, as of unwonted sun;  
Upon the north at midnight hour a mighty noise was heard;  
As if with all his trampling waves the ocean was unbarred;  
And high a grisly terror hung, upstarting from below,  
Like fiery arrow shot aloft from some unmeasured bow.

’Twas not the obedient seraph’s form that burns before the  
throne,  
Whose feathers are the pointed flames that tremble to be  
gone;  
With twists of faded glory mixed, grim shadows wove his  
wing;  
An aspect like the hurrying storm proclaimed the Infernal  
King.  
And up he went, from native might or holy sufferance given,  
As if to strike the starry boss of the high and vaulted heaven.

. . . . .

Winds rose ; from 'neath his settling feet were driven great  
 drifts of snow ;  
 Like hoary hair from off his head did white clouds streaming  
 go ;  
 The gulfy pinewoods far beneath roared surging like a sea ;  
 From out their lairs the striding wolves came howling awfully.  
 But now upon an ice-glazed rock, severely blue, he leant,  
 His spirit by the storm composed that round about him went.”

While in the heart of his expansive dream on the  
 snowy mountains—

“ At last, from out the barren womb of many thousand years,  
 A sound as of the green-leaved earth his thirsty spirit cheers ;  
 And oh ! a presence soft and cool came o'er his burning  
 dream,  
 A form of beauty clad about with fair creation's beam ;  
 A low sweet voice was in his ear, thrilled through his inmost  
 soul,  
 And these the words that bowed his heart with softly sad  
 control :—

‘ No sister e'er hath been to thee with pearly eyes of love ;  
 No mother e'er hath wept for thee, an outcast from above ;  
 No hand hath come from out the cloud, to wash thy scarred  
 face ;  
 No voice to bid thee lie in peace, the noblest of thy race ;  
 But bow thee to the God of Love, and all shall yet be well,  
 And yet in days of holy rest and gladness thou shalt dwell.

And thou shalt dwell 'midst leaves and rills far from this torrid  
 heat ;  
 And I, with streams of cooling milk, will bathe thy blistered  
 feet ;  
 And when the troubled tears shall start to think of all the  
 past,  
 My mouth shall haste to kiss them off, and chase thy sorrows  
 fast ;  
 And thou shalt walk in soft white light with kings and priests  
 abroad,  
 And thou shalt summer high in bliss upon the hills of God.”

And this is the arch-fiend's departure again for his infernal realms :—

“ Quick as the levin, whose blue forks lick up the life of man,  
Aloft he sprung, and through his wings the piercing north  
wind ran ;

Till, like a glimmering lamp that's lit in lazar-house by night,  
To see what mean the sick man's cries, and set his bed aright,  
Which in the dim and sickly air the sputtering shadows mar,  
So gathered darkness high the fiend, till swallowed like a star.

What judgment from the tempted heavens shall on his head  
go forth ?

Down headlong through the firmament he fell upon the  
north :

The stars are up untroubled all in the lofty fields of air :  
The will of God's enough, without His red right arm laid bare.

'Twas He that gave the fiend a space to prove him still the  
same,

Then bade wild hell with hideous laugh be stirred her prey to  
claim.”

In his sketches of external nature, Thomas Aird is occasionally eminently happy,—as in portions of his poems entitled “The Summer,” and “The Winter Day,” which, along with a semi-pastoral character peculiarly their own, combine the grand general outlines of Thomson with Crabbe's faithful, minute, and microscopic observation. It has often struck me that there is a great family likeness between the genius of the late David Scott, the painter of Vasco di Gama, and that of the author of “The Demoniac” and “The Devil's Dream ;” very many of the same characteristic defects, which marred popularity ; and very many of the same high excellencies, which ought to have commanded it.

In 1832 appeared the collected poems of William Motherwell. He had previously made himself known by his “Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern,” a collection

of Scottish ballads industriously collected and ably edited ; and there can be little doubt that the setting about such a task gave an increased impetus to his own genius in the path of lyric poetry. He was about equally successful in two departments—the martial and the plaintive ; yet stirring as are his “Sword Chant of Thorstein Raudi,” and his “Battle Flag of Sigurd,” I doubt much whether they are entitled to the same praise, or have gained the same deserved acceptance, as his “Jeanie Morrison,” or his striking stanzas, commencing “My head is like to rend.” Apart from the inimitable genuine antique, it would be difficult to point out many ballad pictures of early love more purely and simply pathetic than the former of these. Overflowing with nature and pathos, it touches a string to which every heart must vibrate, and would alone entitle Motherwell to a place not unenviable among our poets. He wrote frequently, however, when he ought to have been silent, when his muse was not in the vein ; and, consequently, on such occasions we have clever art, not natural feeling ; the form of verse without the animating spirit. His besetting faults were a straining after sentiment, and an assumption of morbid pensiveness in his descriptions of nature ; but in his happier efforts, where fancy and feeling went hand in hand, he captivates our sympathies, and carries them along with him. The posthumous additions made to the poems of Motherwell, by the kindly zeal of his friends Mr M’Conehy and Mr Kennedy, have, I am afraid, like those of Mr Monckton Milnes, in the similar case of Keats, added to their bulk rather than their value ; and yet, somehow, we should not like to have wanted them. The poems of William Kennedy himself are referable to the same period. His principal poem “The Arrow and the Rose,” may be thought deficient in warmth and tenderness ; but it is skilfully and elegantly versified, and possesses passages of un-

common power and beauty. Several of his lyrics also verge on excellence; but it must be acknowledged of his poetry generally, that ingenious although it be, it rather excites expectation than fairly satisfies it.

The same may be said with regard to a large portion of the poetry of Ebenezer Elliot. With much power, much graphic strength, it wants *amenity*; and he would have been allowed but trifling damages on that pleasant score by a railway-valuator critic. His landscapes abound with wild-roses and brambles, but both have prickles; his cherries resemble sloes, and his apples are generally crabs. You have the wallflower and the woodbine, but you have the foxglove and the nightshade intertwined with them; and while you listen to the linnet singing gaily from the blooming furze, you have somehow a notion that the subtle hawk is somewhere in ambush near him. His sky never shows the calm, clear, unclouded summer blue; some speck on the horizon, although no "bigger than a man's hand," ever predicates storm; and it is impossible to mistake Elliot's moorlands for the Elysian fields. As a depicor of the phases of humanity, his portraits are almost all of one class; and with that class are identified his entire sympathies. Hence it is that he seems deficient in that genial spirit which characterises more catholic natures; in those expansive feelings, which embrace society in all its aspects; in those touches which "make all flesh kin."

Ebenezer Elliot was a man of energetic powers; but it is absurd to mention him, as some have rashly ventured to do, in the same breath with Burns. They were utterly unlike each other in everything, save in one principle—intensity. Burns could ascend from "the Mouse's Nest" destroyed by the plough, up to the march that ushered Bruce to Bannockburn; from the Mountain Daisy gemming the sod, to the last star of that annual morn which recalled his thoughts "to Mary

in Heaven." He had the rough graphic power which could etch "The Deil and Dr Hornbook," and "The Twa Dogs," and "Tam O'Shanter;" but he had also the touch which could pencil with fair delicacy the flowers fit "to be a posie for his ain dear May." It was otherwise with Elliot; and although his harp could not be said to be monotoned, it was much more unequivocally characterised by its chords of power than of tenderness. His history was strange and curious; and he manfully overcame many obstacles in his difficult, onward, and upward career, which would have dismayed a less ardent spirit in its aspirations after literary excellence. In his best productions, as "The Village Patriarch," "The Splendid Village," and "The Ranter," as well as in several of his lyrics, he has attained this excellence in no ordinary—nay, in an uncommon degree; many of his portraits are redolent of breathing life, and not a few of his picturings true to nature. But his taste was the element at fault; and not unfrequently (like James Hogg and Allan Cunningham in their most unsuccessful moods, and when writing in despite "of gods, men, and columns,") Elliot is harsh and involved—nay, condescends to the very confines of doggerel. Of all the English poets who have gained a name—and none ever did so without in some measure deserving it—there are only two whom, I fear, I have never been able adequately to appreciate—and these are Young and Elliot—although to the better parts of both I think I am sufficiently alive; and there is something of unhewn power in each not dissimilar. My strictures on Elliot must, therefore, be taken *cum grano salis*. Probably I have not been able to make sufficient allowances for the ever-recurring instances of false or indifferent taste conspicuous in both, and which has destroyed so much of the delight which their unquestioned vigour of fancy and intellect could not otherwise have failed to produce;—for that Ebenezer Elliot had excellencies of an uncom-

mon kind has been proved by the hold which at least the better portion of his writings have taken of the public mind.

Thomas Hood was the complete counterpart of Elliot. The one from manner—and probably from that alone—seemed not able to say even a kind thing graciously ; the other could not say what might even be reckoned an unkind thing without grace. *Quicquid tetigit ornavit.*

With some resemblance to Hunt and Keats, Thomas Hood had a manner and style racy, original, and peculiarly his own : but it was long ere he discovered this, and he only attained excellence in it in his latter pieces. He erroneously thought, through many years, that his forte lay between the classical and the imaginative, and so wasted his fine powers on “The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies,” on “Lycus the Centaur,” “Hero and Leander,” and similar efforts, which are vague, diffuse, passionless, and ineffective. He was thus like an itinerant street performer, who through half his lifetime has been blowing away his lungs on the Pan’s-pipes, or cramping his wrist with the hurdy-gurdy, suddenly finding, to his own particular amazement, that he is fit for the concert-room, on the flageolet or the French horn ; and certainly not quite in the position of the witty Harry Erskine’s Fife Laird, who, when asked if he could play the violin, made answer, that “he was not very sure, as he had never tried.” Hood made sure by trying ; and the result was very different from what must have been predicated of the Laird’s first attempt, although it was towards the termination of his career when he felt, for the first time, that his real strength lay in “the homely tragic,” of which he soon gave an immortal proof in his “Dream of Eugene Aram,” which thus delightfully opens—

“ ’Twas in the prime of summer time,  
An evening calm and cool,



And four-and-twenty happy boys  
 Came bounding out of school ;  
 There were some that ran, and some that leapt,  
 Like troutlets in a pool.

Away they sped with gamesome minds,  
 And souls untouched by sin ;  
 To a level mead they came, and there  
 They drave the wickets in ;  
 Pleasantly shone the setting sun  
 Over the town of Lynn."

Nor less successful in a similar style, although with a commixture of wilder and more imaginative elements, were "The Haunted House" and "The Elm Tree," in both of which the effects resulted from a succession of fine and minute touches. Hood possessed also much of the genial humour of Addison, Goldsmith, and Charles Lamb ; but his main triumph, as I have just said, lay in the simple pathetic,—and he has established for himself a name that poetry "may not willingly let die," in "The Song of the Shirt," "The Bridge of Sighs," "The Workhouse Clock," and several other lyrics of exquisite natural beauty and feeling. What heart does not respond to the touching associations of the following voluntary :—

" I remember, I remember  
 The house where I was born,  
 The little window where the sun  
 Came peeping in at morn :  
 He never came a wink too soon,  
 Nor brought too long a day,  
 But now I often wish the night  
 Had borne my breath away !

I remember, I remember  
 The roses red and white,  
 The violets and the lily-cups,  
 Those flowers made of light !

The lilacs where the robin built,  
 And where my brother set  
 The laburnum on his birth-day,—  
 The tree is growing yet !

I remember, I remember  
 The fir-trees dark and high—  
 I used to think their slender tops  
 Were close against the sky ;  
 It was a childish ignorance,  
 But now 'tis little joy  
 To know I'm farther off from heaven  
 Than when I was a boy !”

For a long time Hood seemed content to take his place as a mere clever rhyming punster: he then showed the “*seria mista jocis*,” and finally came out the high and deep-souled poet. In the transition state, his volubility in rhyming was even more alarmingly wonderful than that of Thomas Ingoldsby or Theodore Hook. The flights of Dædalian Icarus, or Ariosto's Hippogriff, or Chaucer's steed of brass, or Burger's Leonora, or Lunardi's balloon, or Hogg's Witch of Fife, or Byron's Mazeppa, or Cowper's John Gilpin, were scarcely more perilous than that of Miss Kilmansegg through the streets of London, on Banker, “her rich bay,” as witness this narrative of it:—

“ Away, like the bolt of a rabbit,  
 Away went the horse in the madness of fright,  
 And away went the horsewoman, mocking the sight—  
 Was yonder blue flash a flash of blue light,  
 Or only the skirt of her habit ?

Away she flies, with the groom behind,  
 It looks like a race of the Calmuck kind,  
 When Hymen himself is the starter :  
 And the maid rides first in the four-footed strife,  
 Riding, striding, as if for her life,  
 While the lover rides after to catch him a wife,  
 Although it's catching a Tartar.

Still flies the heiress through stones and dust,  
 Oh ! for a fall, if fall she must,  
     On the gentle lap of Flora !  
 But still, thank heaven, she clings to her seat,  
 Away ! away ! she could ride a dead heat  
 With the dead who ride so fast and fleet  
     In the ballad of Leonora !

Away she gallops ! It's awful work,  
 It's faster than Turpin's ride to York  
     On Bess, that notable clipper !  
 She has circled the ring ! she crosses the park !  
 Mazeppa, although he was stripped so stark,  
     Mazeppa couldn't outstrip her !

The fields seem running away with the folks !  
 The elms are having a race for the Oaks,  
     At a pace that all jockeys disparages !  
 All, all is racing ! The Serpentine  
 Seems running past like 'the arrowy Rhine,'  
 The houses have got on a railway line,  
     And are off with the first-class carriages !

She'll lose her life ! She's losing her breath !  
 A cruel chase—she is chasing death,  
     As female shriekings forewarn her ;  
 And now—as gratis as blood of Guelph—  
 She clears the gate, which has cleared itself  
     Since then, at Hyde Park Corner !

Alas ! for the hope of the Kilmanseggs !  
 For her head, her brains, her body and legs,  
     Her life's not worth a copper !  
 Willy-nilly—in Piccadilly  
 A hundred hearts turn sick and chilly ;  
     A hundred voices cry, 'Stop her !'  
 And one old gentleman stares and stands,  
 Shakes his head, and lifts his hands,  
     And says, 'How very improper !'

On and on !—what a perilous run !  
 The iron rails seem all mingling in one,  
     To shut out the Green Park scenery ;  
 And now the Cellar its dangers reveals—  
 She shudders—she shrieks—she's doomed, she feels,  
 To be torn by powers of horses and wheels,  
     Like a spinner by steam machinery !

Sick with horror, she shuts her eyes—  
 The very stones seem uttering cries.

    .     .     .     .     .     .  
     ' Batter her ! shatter her !  
     Throw and scatter her ! '   
 Shouts each stony-hearted chatterer.  
     ' Dash at the heavy Dover !  
 Spill her ! kill her ! tear and tatter her !  
 Smash her ! crash her ! (the stones didn't flatter her !)  
 Kick her brains out ! let her blood spatter her !  
     Roll on her over and over ! '   
 For so she gathered her awful sense  
 Of the street in its past unmacadamised tense,  
     As the wild horse overran it—  
 His four heels making the clatter of six,  
 Like a devil's tatoo played with iron sticks  
     On a kettle-drum of granite.

On ! still on ! she's dazzled with hints  
 Of oranges, ribbons, and coloured prints,  
 A kaleidoscope jumble of shapes and tints,  
     And human faces all flashing,  
 Bright and brief as the sparks from the flints,  
     That the desperate hoofs keep dashing !

On and on ! still frightfully fast !  
 Dover Street, Bond Street, all are past !  
 But yes—no—yes ! they are down at last !  
     The Furies and Fates have found them !  
 Down they go with a sparkle and crash,  
 Like a bark that's struck by a lightning flash—  
 There's a shriek and a sob—and the dense, dark mob  
     Like a billow closes around them ! "

Hood's verse, whether serious or comic — whether serene like a cloudless autumn evening, or sparkling with puns like a frosty January midnight with stars— was ever pregnant with materials for thought. In his "Elm Tree" we have a piece of secluded forest scenery, touched with a strange and gloomy power—creating that state of mind in Scotland termed *eeriness*, and for which I am ignorant of any English synonyme. This poem has the same reference to Tennyson's "Talking Oak" that a Rembrandt picture, with its deep masses and dark shadows, has to a sunbright Hobbima. Its power, as well as that in "The Haunted House," is effected, as I have said, not by a few bold master-strokes, but by a succession of minute cumulative touches, which make seclusion deepen into awe, and awe to darken into the mysterious gloom of earthquake and eclipse and the shadow of death. "The Song of the Shirt" and "The Workhouse Clock" are only strains preclusive to "The Bridge of Sighs." Throughout these and other lyrics, we have utterances alike deep and high of Hood's genius—a genius resembling that of Charles Lamb, in being at once pleasant and peculiar.

His comic vein was equally remarkable, and was almost the only one that he worked through a succession of years. It is only necessary to mention the "Irish Schoolmaster," "The Last Man," the "Ode on a distant view of Clapham Academy," "Faithless Sally Brown," and "Miss Kilmansegg with her Golden Leg," to awaken pleasant remembrances in many a mind. Yet, like every author distinguished for true comic humour, there was a deep vein of melancholy pathos running through his mirth; and even when his sun shone brightly, its light seemed often reflected as if only over the rim of a cloud. Well may we say in the words of Tennyson, "Would he could have stayed with us!" for never could it be more truly recorded of any one—in the words of Hamlet characterising Yorick — that

"he was a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."

I cannot part from Thomas Hood without exhibiting him in one of his most characteristic ballads, wherein we have puns "as plenty as blackberries,"—"linen on every hedge."

"Young Ben he was a nice young man,  
A carpenter by trade ;  
And he fell in love with Sally Brown,  
Who was a lady's maid.

But as they fetched a walk one day,  
They met a press-gang crew ;  
And Sally she did faint away,  
Whilst Ben he was brought to.

The boatswain swore with wicked words,  
Enough to shock a saint,  
That, though she did seem in a fit,  
'Twas nothing but a feint.

'Come, girl,' said he, 'hold up your head,  
He'll be as good as me ;  
For when your swain is in our boat,  
A boatswain he will be.'

So when they'd made their game of her,  
And taken off her elf,  
She roused, and found she only was  
A-coming to herself.

'And is he gone, and is he gone ?'  
She cried, and wept outright :  
'Then I will to the water-side,  
And see him out of sight.'

A waterman came up to her,  
'Now, young woman,' said he,  
'If you weep on so, you will make  
Eye-water in the sea.'

‘ Alas ! they’ve taken my beau Ben,  
 To sail with old Ben-bow ;’  
 And her woe begun to run afresh,  
 As if she had said ‘ Gee woe !’

Says he, ‘ They’ve only taken him  
 To the tender-ship you see ;’  
 ‘ The tender-ship !’ cried Sally Brown,  
 ‘ What a hard-ship that must be !

Oh ! would I were a mermaid now,  
 For then I’d follow him ;  
 But oh ! I’m not a fish-woman,  
 And so I cannot swim.

Alas ! I was not born beneath  
 The Virgin and the Scales,  
 So I must curse my cruel stars  
 And walk about in Wales.’

Now Ben had sailed to many a place  
 That’s underneath the world ;  
 But in two years the ship came home  
 And all her sails were furled.

But when he called on Sally Brown,  
 To see how she got on,  
 He found she’d got another Ben,  
 Whose Christian name was John.

‘ Oh Sally Brown, oh Sally Brown,  
 How could you serve me so !  
 I’ve met with many a breeze before,  
 But never such a blow !’

Then, reading on his ’bacco-box,  
 He heaved a heavy sigh,  
 And then began to eye his pipe,  
 And then to pipe his eye.

And then he tried to sing 'All's Well,'  
But could not, though he tried;  
His head was turned, and so he chewed  
His pigtail till he died.

His death, which happened in his birth,  
At forty odd befell :  
They went and told the Sexton, and  
The Sexton tolled the bell !"

O rare Tom Hood !



## LECTURE VI.

### PART FIRST

Female constellation.—Joanna Baillie, Metrical Legends.—*Love of Fame*.—Felicia Hemans.—Historic Scenes, Forest Sanctuary, Records of Woman, and Miscellanies.—Character of her poetry.—Specimens, *Dirge*, *The Trumpet*, and *Vaudois Hymn*.—Caroline Bowles, *The Widow's Tale*, *Solitary Hours*, *The Birthday*, *Robin Hood*.—Analysis of *The Young Grey Head*, with extracts.—Mary Russell Mitford, *Maria Jewsbury*, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon*; *Improvisatrice*, *Venetian Bracelet*, *Golden Violet*, *Remains*.—Mary Howitt, the excellence of her ballad poetry: *The Spider and the Fly*.—Caroline Norton: *The Dream*, *Child of the Islands*, and *Songs*.—Lady Flora Hastings, *Harriet Drury*, and *Camilla Toulmin*.—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, her genius and its imperfect development: *Drama of Exile*, *Cry of the Children*.—Professor R. C. Trench.—Elegiac Poems, *Justin Martyr*, *Poems from Eastern Sources*, *The Suppliant*.—Thomas Pringle, *John Clare*, *Bernard Barton*, *Thomas Haynes Bayley*, *Alaric A. Watts*.—Specimen, *Child blowing Bubbles*.—T. K. Hervey.—Rev. Charles Wolfe.—*The Squire's Pew*, by *Jane Taylor*.—Various other poets of the period.

IN the same year that Wordsworth and Coleridge brought out the *Lyrical Ballads*—the first offerings of a new code of poetry, in contradistinction to that of Hayley, Darwin, and the *Della Cruscan*s, Joanna Baillie gave the first volume of her “*Plays on the Passions*,” to a Drama monopolised by the tame conventionalities of Cumberland and Murphy. Nor were their theories widely different; for, in the *Preliminary Discourse* by which she ushered in that work, we find her emphatically maintaining, that “one simple trait of the human heart, one expression of passion, genuine and

true to nature, will stand forth alone in the boldness of reality, while the false and unnatural around it fades away on every side, like the rising exhalations of the morning." Her dramas, both tragic and comic, were forcible illustrations of this code; and it must be admitted, from published proof, that she thus forestalled, or at least divided, the claim to originality inducted in the theory and practice of Wordsworth, as shown by his "Lyric Ballads" and their preface.

But Joanna Baillie, as the author of "Count Basil" and "De Montfort," is entitled to a much higher place among dramatists, than the author of "Metrical Legends" is among mere poets. With much imaginative energy, much observant thought, and great freedom and force of delineation, together with a fine feeling of nature, and an occasional Massingerian softness of diction, it may be claimed for Joanna Baillie that she uniformly keeps apart from the trite and commonplace; yet we cannot help feeling a deficiency of art, and tact, and taste, alike in the management of her themes and the structure of her verse. Her tales, as tales, often want keeping, and their materials are put together by a hand apparently unpractised. Nor even in her emotional bursts, where she ought to have certainly succeeded, is she always quite happy, as a dash of the falsetto is, occasionally at least, not unapparent.

Of these "Metrical Legends," three in number—"Sir William Wallace," "Columbus," and "Lady Griseld Baillie,"—the last ranks highest in poetical merit; although all are more or less liable to the objections just stated. In that dedicated to Columbus, the following spirited lines occur:—

"O! who shall lightly say, that Fame  
Is nothing but an empty name!  
Whilst in that sound there is a charm  
The nerves to brace, the heart to warm,

As, thinking of the mighty dead,  
 The young from slothful couch will start,  
 And vow, with lifted hands outspread,  
 Like them to act a noble part?  
 O! who shall lightly say that Fame  
 Is nothing but an empty name!  
 When, but for those, our mighty dead,  
 All ages past a blank would be,  
 Sunk in oblivion's murky bed,  
 A desert bare, a shipless sea?  
 They are the distant objects seen,—  
 The lofty marks of what hath been.  
 O! who shall lightly say that Fame  
 Is nothing but an empty name!  
 When records of the mighty dead  
 To earth-worn pilgrim's wistful eye  
 The brightest rays of cheering shed,  
 That point to immortality?"

Joanna Baillie is happier in her mere ballads, especially in that entitled "The Ghost of Fadon;" and several of her songs in the collection of George Thomson—alas! gone from among us since my last Lecture—as, "The Trysting Tree," and "Welcome Bat and Owlet Grey," as well as in those scattered throughout her dramas, are characterised by simplicity of feeling and freshness of nature. The most generally appreciated among her miscellaneous pieces has been that named "The Kitten," which, under a riant playfulness of tone, conveys many a sober moral, and may even bear comparison with Wordsworth's well-known verses on the same subject. It cannot be said, however, that Joanna Baillie's poetry has been so framed as to catch the public ear; for, like Coleridge, Savage Landor, and Aird, she has been much more admired than read.

Otherwise has been the fate of Felicia Hemans, by far the most popular of our poetesses, alike at home and beyond the Atlantic: nor do I say undeservedly. She may indeed be said "to have lisped in numbers," as she

rhymed almost as soon as she read, and her first collection of verses appeared when she was in her fifteenth year. These, as might have been expected, were only wonderful when the author's age was considered ; and her real career may be set down as having commenced in 1817, in her poems, "The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy," and "Modern Greece." From that time, until her lamented death in 1835, she continued to write with untiring zeal and industry, exhibiting a variety and richness of genius which, in my opinion, fairly entitled her to the female laureate-crown. In rapid succession appeared her "Translations from the Spanish and Italian Poets," the "Tales and Historic Scenes," "The Sceptic," "Dartmoor," "The Forest Sanctuary," "The Records of Woman," (the culminating point of her genius,) the "Songs of the Affections," the "Lyrics and Songs for Music," and the "Hymns and Scenes of Life," together with an amazing number of detached pieces in almost every possible variety of style and measure, all far above commonplace in conception and execution, and not a few of matchless and unfading splendour.

To Joanna Baillie, Mrs Hemans might be inferior, not only in vigour of conception, but in the power of metaphysically analysing those sentiments and emotions which constitute the groundwork of human action,—to Mrs Jameson, in the critical perception which, from detached fragments of spoken thought, can discriminate the links which bind all into one distinctive character,—to Letitia Landon, in eloquent facility,—to Caroline Bowles, in simple pathos,—to Mary Howitt, in fresh nature,—and to Mary Mitford, in graphic strength ;—but as a female writer, influencing not only the female but the general mind, she is undoubtedly entitled to rank above all these her cotemporaries, in whatever relation she may be supposed by some to stand to her successor, Mrs Browning ; and this pre-eminence has

been acknowledged, not only in our own land, but wherever the English tongue is spoken, whether on the banks of the Eastern Ganges or the Western Mississippi. Her path was emphatically her own, as truly as that of Wordsworth, Scott, Crabbe, or Byron; and shoals of imitators have arisen alike at home and on the other side of the Atlantic, who, destitute of her animating genius, have mimicked her themes and parodied her sentiments and language, without being able to keep even within compare of her excellencies. In her poetry, religious truth, moral purity, and intellectual beauty ever meet together; and assuredly it is not less calculated to refine the taste and exalt the imagination, because it addresses itself almost exclusively to the better feelings of our nature. Over all her pictures of humanity are spread the glory and the grace reflected from virtuous purity, delicacy of perception and conception, sublimity of religious faith, home-bred delights, and the generous expansive ardour of patriotism; while, turning from the dark and degraded, whether in subject or sentiment, she seeks out those verdant oases in the desert of human life, on which the affections may most pleasantly rest. Her poetry is intensely and entirely feminine; and, in my estimation, this is the highest praise which, in one point of view, could be awarded it. It could have been written by a woman only: for although, in the "Records" of her sex, we have the female character delineated in all the varied phases of baffled passion and of ill-requited affection, of heroic self-denial and of withering hope deferred, of devotedness tried in the furnace of affliction, and of

"Gentle feelings long subdued,  
Subdued and cherished long"—

yet its energy resembles that of the dove, "pecking the hand that hovers o'er its mate;" and its exaltation of thought is not of that daring kind which doubts and

derides, or even questions—for a female sceptic is a monstrous and repulsive excrescence on human nature—but which clings to the anchor of hope, and looks forward to a higher immortal destiny with faith and reverential fear.

Mrs Hemans wrote much and fluently; and, as with all authors in like predicament, her strains were of various degrees of excellence. Independently of this, her different works will be differently estimated as to their relative value by different minds; but among the lyrics of the English language which can scarcely die, I hesitate not to assign places to "The Hebrew Mother," "The Treasures of the Deep," "The Spirit's Return," "The Homes of England," "The Better Land," "The Hour of Death," "The Trumpet," "The Dirge of a Highland Chief," "The Song of a Captive Knight," and "The Graves of a Household." In these "gems of purest ray serene," the peculiar genius of Mrs Hemans breathes and burns and shines pre-eminent; for her forte lay in depicting whatever tends to beautify and embellish domestic life, by purifying the passions and by sanctifying the affections, making man an undying, unquenchable spirit, and earth, his abode, a holy place—the gentle overflowings of love and friendship—"home-bred delights and heartfelt happiness,"—the glowing associations of local attachment—and the influence of religious feelings over the soul, whether arising from the varied circumstances and situations of life, or from the aspects of external nature.

The writings of Mrs Hemans seem to divide themselves into two pretty distinct portions; the first comprehending her "Modern Greece," "Wallace," "Dartmoor," "The Sceptic," "Historic Scenes," and other productions, up to the publication of "The Forest Sanctuary;" and the latter comprehending that fine poem, the "Records of Woman," the "Songs of the Affec-

tions," the "Scenes and Hymns of Life," and all her subsequent productions. In her earlier works she follows the classic model, as contradistinguished from the romantic; and they are inferior in that polish of style, that exquisite delicacy of thought, and that almost gorgeous richness of language which characterise her maturer compositions. Combined with increased self-reliance and an art improved by practice, it is evident that new stores of thought were latterly opened up to Mrs Hemans, in a more extended acquaintance with the literature of Spain and Germany, as well as by a profounder study of what was truly excellent in the writings of our greatest poetical regenerator, Wordsworth.

In illustration of what I have just said, I give short specimens of her early, her transition, and her latest manner; although, from amid so much general beauty, it is somewhat difficult to make selection:—

THE DIRGE OF FERGUS MACIVOR.

"Son of the mighty and the free!  
 Loved leader of the faithful brave!  
 Was it for high-souled chief like thee  
 To fill a nameless grave?  
 Oh! if amidst the valiant slain  
 The warrior's bier had been thy lot,  
 E'en though on red Culloden's plain,  
 We then had mourned thee not.

But darkly closed thy dawn of fame,  
 That dawn whose sunbeam rose so fair;  
 Vengeance alone may breathe thy name,  
 The watchword of Despair!  
 Yet oh! if gallant spirit's power  
 Hath e'er ennobled death like thine,  
 Then glory marked thy parting hour,  
 Last of a mighty line!

O'er thy own towers the sunshine falls,  
 But cannot chase their silent gloom ;  
 Those beams that gild thy native walls  
 Are sleeping on thy tomb !  
 Spring on thy mountains laughs the while,  
 Thy green woods wave in vernal air,  
 But the loved scenes may vainly smile—  
 Not e'en thy dust is there.

On thy blue hills no bugle-sound  
 Is mingling with the torrent's roar ;  
 Unmarked, the wild deer sport around—  
 Thou lead'st the chase no more !  
 Thy gates are closed, thy halls are still—  
 Those halls where pealed the choral strain—  
 They hear the wind's deep murmuring thrill,  
 And all is hushed again.

No banner from the lonely tower  
 Shall wave its blazoned folds on high ;  
 There the tall grass and summer flower  
 Unmarked shall spring and die.  
 No more thy bard for other ear  
 Shall wake the harp once loved by thine—  
 Hushed be the strain thou canst not hear,  
 Last of a mighty line !"

These verses I reckon not unworthy even of the immortal pen that, in the pages of "Waverley," recounted the adventures of the semi-fictitious hero they commemorate. They are exquisitely beautiful, and may be taken as representing Mrs Hemans' best early manner—as they were written in 1815. The following little poem, which, at its conclusion, almost touches the sublime, shows the characteristics of her style ere finally and maturely formed :—

"The trumpet's voice hath roused the land—  
 Light up the beacon pyre !  
 A hundred hills have seen the brand,  
 And waved the sign of fire.



A hundred banners to the breeze  
 Their gorgeous folds have cast—  
 And, hark ! was that the sound of seas ?  
 A king to war went past.

The chief is arming in his hall,  
 The peasant by his hearth ;  
 The mourner hears the thrilling call,  
 And rises from the earth.  
 The mother on her first-born son  
 Looks with a boding eye—  
 They come not back, though all be won,  
 Whose young hearts leap so high.

The bard hath ceased his song, and bound  
 The falchion to his side ;  
 E'en, for the marriage-altar crowned,  
 The lover quits his bride.  
 And all this change, and haste, and fear,  
 By earthly clarion spread !—  
 How will it be when kingdoms hear  
 The blast that wakes the dead ?”

Of their author's last best manner, the finest examples are perhaps “The Hebrew Mother,” “The Palm Tree,” “The Hour of Romance,” “The Treasures of the Deep,” and “Despondency and Aspiration.” The following stanzas from the “Hymn of the Vaudois Mountaineers” may, however, serve our purpose :—

“For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
 Our God, our fathers' God !  
 Thou hast made thy children mighty,  
 By the touch of the mountain-sod.  
 Thou hast fixed our ark of refuge  
 Where the spoiler's foot ne'er trod ;  
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
 Our God, our fathers' God.

We are watchers of a beacon  
 Whose light must never die ;  
 We are guardians of an altar  
 Midst the silence of the sky :  
 The rocks yield founts of courage,  
 Struck forth as by thy rod ;  
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
 Our God, our fathers' God !

For the dark, resounding caverns,  
 Where thy still, small voice is heard ;  
 For the strong pines of the forests,  
 That by thy breath are stirred ;  
 For the storms, on whose free pinions  
 Thy spirit walks abroad ;  
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
 Our God, our father's God !

The royal eagle darteth  
 On his quarry from the heights,  
 And the stag that knows no master,  
 Seeks there his wild delights ;  
 But we, for thy communion,  
 Have sought the mountain-sod ;  
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
 Our God, our fathers' God !”

Three years after the “Modern Greece” of Mrs Hemans, appeared the “Ellen Fitzarthur” of Caroline Bowles, afterwards Mrs Southey. To much of the fresh simple nature—the “To-morrow to fresh Fields and Pastures new,” of Joanna Baillie, she united not a little of the observant truth and searching pathos of Crabbe, with a delicacy of tact and feeling peculiarly her own. The dawnings of her genius appeared in the production just mentioned, as well as in its successor, “The Widow’s Tale ;” but it is in the “Solitary Hours,” the “Tales of the Factories,” “The Birthday,” and her contributions to the volume entitled “Robin Hood”—

a conjunct of her own and the Laureate's—that we recognise the triumphs of her maturer genius. We therein find all the varied impulses of a gentle nature, all the finer feelings of a woman's heart. No man could have written such poetry—at least no man has ever yet done so: it breathes of “a purer ether, a diviner air” than that respired by the *soi-disant* lords of the creation; and in its freedom from all moral blemish and blot—from all harshness and austerity of sentiment—from all the polluting taints which are apt to cleave to human thought, and its expansive sympathy with all that is holy, just, and of good report—it elevates the heart even more than it delights the fancy. We doubt if the English language possesses anything more profoundly pathetic than Mrs Southey's four tales, “The Young Grey Head,” “The Murder Glen,” “Walter and William,” and “The Evening Walk;” and I envy not the heart-construction of that family group, of which the father could read these compositions aloud to his children either himself with an unfaltering voice, or without exciting their tears. Several of her ballads, as “The Lady's Brydalle,” “The Broken Bridge,” and “The Greenwood Shrift,” are all so admirable, full of softness and sweetness and simple nature, like landscapes by Morland or Gainsborough or Linnel; while her lyrics in a higher and more sentimental strain, as “The Pauper's Deathbed,” “'Tis hard to die in Spring,” “The Mariner's Hymn,” “There is a tongue in every Leaf,” “Sabbath Evening,” and “To a Dying Infant,” are bright with the reflected graces of a harmonising fancy and a reflecting spirit. The heart of no Englishwoman was ever more certainly in its right place than that of Caroline Bowles.

I cannot resist giving an analysis and specimens of one of the tales alluded to, and select that entitled “The Young Grey Head.”

It opens with a cottager warning his wife to keep

the children from school that morning, from the signs of impending storm—

"I'm thinking that to-night, if not before,  
There'll be wild work. Dost hear old Chewton roar?  
It's brewing up, down westward; and look there!  
One of those sea-gulls!—ay, there goes a pair;  
And such a sudden thaw! If rain comes on,  
As threats, the waters will be out anon.  
That path by the ford's a nasty bit of way—  
Best let the young ones bide from school to-day."

The children themselves join in this request; but the mother resolves that they should set out—the two girls, Lizzy and Jenny, the one five and the other seven. As the dame's will was law, so,

"One last fond kiss—  
'God bless my little maids,' the father said;  
And cheerily went his way to win their bread."

Prepared for their journey, they depart, with the mother's admonitions to the elder,—

"Now, mind and bring  
Jenny safe home,' the mother said. 'Don't stay  
To pull a bough or berry by the way;  
And when you come to cross the ford, hold fast  
Your little sister's hand till you're quite past—  
That plank's so crazy, and so slippery,  
If not o'erflowed, the stepping-stones will be.  
But you're good children—steady as old folk,  
I'd trust ye anywhere.' Then Lizzy's cloak  
(A good grey duffle) lovingly she tied,  
And amply little Jenny's lack supplied  
With her own warmest shawl. 'Be sure,' said she,  
'To wrap it round, and knot it carefully  
(Like this) when you come home—just leaving free  
One hand to hold by. Now make haste away—  
Good will to school, and then good right to play."

The mother watched them as they went down the lane, o'erburdened with something like a foreboding of evil which she strove to overcome ; but could not during the day quite bear up against her own thoughts, more especially as the threatened storm did at length truly set in. His labour done, the husband makes his three miles' way homeward, until his cottage coming into view, all its pleasant associations of spring, summer, and autumn, with its thousand family delights, rush on his heart :—

“ There was a treasure hidden in his hat—  
A plaything for his young ones. He had found  
A dormouse nest ; the living ball coiled round  
For its long winter sleep ; and all his thought,  
As he trudged stoutly homeward, was of nought  
But the glad wonderment in Jenny's eyes,  
And graver Lizzy's quieter surprise,  
When he should yield, by guess and kiss and prayer,  
Hard won, the frozen captive to their care.”

Out rushes his fondling dog Tinker, but no little faces greet him as wont at the threshold ; and to his hurried question, “ Are they come ?—’twas no.”

“ To throw his tools down, hastily unhook  
The old cracked lantern from its dusty nook,  
And, while he lit it, speak a cheering word  
That almost choked him, and was scarcely heard,  
Was but a moment's act, and he was gone  
To where a fearful foresight led him on.”

A neighbour accompanies him ; and they strike into the track which the children should have taken in their way back—now calling aloud on them through the pitchy darkness—and now by the lantern-light scrutinising “ thicket, bole, and nook,” till the dog, brushing past them with a bark, shows them that he was on their track :—

"Hold the light  
 Low down—he's making for the water. Hark!  
 I know that whine—the old dog's found them, Mark.'  
 So speaking, breathlessly he hurried on  
 Toward the old crazy foot-bridge. It was gone!  
 And all his dull contracted light could show  
 Was the black, void, and dark swollen stream below.  
 'Yet there's life somewhere—more than Tinker's whine—  
 That's sure,' said Mark. 'So, let the lantern shine  
 Down yonder. There's the dog—and hark!'  
 'Oh dear!'

And a low sob came faintly on the ear,  
 Mocked by the sobbing gust. Down, quick as thought,  
 Into the stream leaped Ambrose, where he caught  
 Fast hold of something—a dark huddled heap—  
 Half in the water, where 'twas scarce knee-deep  
 For a tall man; and half above it propped  
 By some old ragged side-piles that had stopt  
 Endways the broken plank when it gave way  
 With the two little ones that luckless day!  
 'My babes! my lambkins!' was the father's cry—  
*One little voice* made answer, 'Here am I!'  
 'Twas Lizzy's. There she crouched, with face as white,  
 More ghastly, by the flickering lantern-light,  
 Than sheeted corpse. The pale blue lips drawn tight,  
 Wide parted, showing all the pearly teeth,  
 And eyes on some dark object underneath,  
 Washed by the turbid water, fixed like stone—  
 One arm and hand stretched out, and rigid grown,  
 Grasping, as in the death-gripe, Jenny's frock.  
 There she lay drowned. . . . .

They lifted her from out her watery bed—  
 Its covering gone, the lovely little head  
 Hung, like a broken snow-drop, all aside,  
 And one small hand. The mother's shawl was tied,  
 Leaving *that* free about the child's small form,  
 As was her last injunction—'fast and warm'—  
 Too well obeyed—too fast! A fatal hold,  
 Affording to the scrag, by a thick fold  
 That caught and pinned her to the river's bed:

While through the reckless water overhead,  
Her life-breath bubbled up."

I pass over the cruel self-upbraidings of the mother ;  
for—

" ' She might have lived,  
Struggling like Lizzy,' was the thought that rived  
The wretched mother's heart, when she knew all,  
' But for my foolishness about that shawl ' "—

a torture aggravated by the tones of the surviving child,  
who, half deliriously, kept on ejaculating—

" ' Who says I forgot ?  
Mother ! indeed, indeed I kept fast hold,  
And tied the shawl quite close—she can't be cold—  
But she won't move—we slept—I don't know how—  
But I held on—and I'm so weary now—  
And it's so dark and cold !—oh dear ! oh dear !—  
And she won't move—if daddy was but here ! ' "

From their despair for the lost, the poor parents turned  
to their almost forlorn hope in the living, as—

" All night long from side to side she turned,  
Piteously plaining like a wounded dove,  
With now and then the murmur, ' She won't move.'  
And lo ! when morning, as in mockery, bright  
Shone on that pillow—passing strange the sight—  
The young head's raven hair was streaked with white ! "

About poetry like this, fresh from the fountain of the  
heart, " with beaded bubbles yet winking on the brim,"  
there can be no mistake. It is beyond critic's cavils,  
for it tells ; and I would rather be the author of such—  
because it will be as good a hundred years hence as  
now—than of all the statelier philosophic analyses of  
feeling—the present favourite subjects of a mere fashion,  
which, when it fades, must be for ever.

In this brilliant constellation of female genius, which

gained its culminating point about twenty-five years ago, and which numbered, with the names already mentioned, those also of Mary Russell Mitford, Maria Jewsbury, and Mary Howitt, Letitia Elizabeth Landon succeeded in obtaining that popularity which was second only to Mrs Hemans. Like her, she was brought out as a juvenile prodigy, with much flourish of critical trumpets, and, while yet in her teens, produced "The Improvisatrice," to prove that such encomiums, however exorbitant they might seem, were not altogether misplaced; for it unquestionably exhibited a liveliness of fancy, store of poetical ideas, command of language, and an ear attuned to the varied cadences of verse. Its prime fault was diffuseness—a fault of inexperience, and less prominent in her subsequent appearances, "The Troubadour," "The Golden Violet," and "The Venetian Bracelet," which are all distinguished by greater concentration of thought and style. Her earlier writings exhibited a peculiar constitution of genius. She arrayed her portraits in the brilliant costume of Moore, and exhibited them against the gloomy background of Byron; always, at the same time, preserving enough of individuality to make and keep them distinctively her own. Like the former, her earth was too full of roses and singing-birds, and love: like the latter, her skies were too often the theatre of whirlwind, of lightning, thunder-cloud, and storm. She was always in extremes—either in the seventh heaven of ecstasy, or in the lowest depths of hypochondriacal sadness. She "no trite medium knew;" but her walk was her own, although she might be said to differ from some of her cotemporaries less in distinctive excellencies than in distinctive peculiarities. Her deficiency alike in judgment and taste made her wayward and capricious, and her efforts seemed frequently impulsive. Hence she gave to the public a great deal too much—a large part of her writings being destitute of that elaboration, care,



and finish essentially necessary in the fine arts, even when in combination with the highest genius, to secure permanent success; for the finest poetry is that which is suggestive—the result as much of what has been studiously withheld as of what has been elaborately given. It is quite apparent, however, that L. E. L. had opened her eyes to these her defects, and was rapidly overcoming them; for her very last things—those published in her “Remains,” by Laman Blanchard—are incomparably her best, whether we regard vigorous conception, concentration of idea, or judicious selection of subject. Her faults originated in an enthusiastic temperament and an efflorescent fancy; and showed themselves, as might have been expected, in an uncurbed prodigality of glittering imagery,—her muse, untamed and untutored, ever darting in dalliance from one object to another, like the talismanic bird in the Arabian story. Alas! that on such a sunny noon should have instantaneously descended an eve so dark and so dismal!

“All that we know is—nothing can be known!”

Miss Mitford requires only a passing mention here. Her first claims on the public were no doubt as a poetess, in her early “Sketches,” and in her “Christina, the Maid of the South Seas”—a six-canto production of the Sir Walter Scott school, of considerable merit; but she is chiefly to be remembered as the author of “Our Village,” so full of truth and raciness and fine English life; and for her three tragedies—“Julian,” “The Vespers of Palermo,” and “Rienzi”—the last of which was, I believe, eminently successful in representation. Her latter verses are all able and elegant; but she is deficient in that nameless adaptation of expression to thought accomplished by some indescribable, some inexplicable collocation of the best words in their best places, apparently quite necessary for the success of poetical phrase. This power, on the contrary, Mary Howitt

possesses in perfection, while she is somewhat wanting in the essential matter—the more solid materials—which Miss Mitford seems to have ever at command. The one is mightiest in facts, the other in fancy.

In Mary Howitt's first conjunct volume with her husband—"The Forest Minstrel"—everything had the true flavour of the country. The reader was led entranced through "bosky bournes and bushy dells," the air was redolent of fir-cones ; wild roses sprang in every wayside hedge ; and you could not peep into a thicket without discovering a bird's nest. The features of all the hours throughout the varying seasons were marked, and no worshipper ever bowed a more faithful knee at the shrine of nature. "The Desolation of Eyam," also a conjunct volume, followed at no great distance of time, and evidenced distinct improvement in both writers, alike in style, manner, and precision of imagery. To a simplicity of language and feeling almost amounting to the pastoral, were united a taste and elegance generally supposed to characterise compositions of a more ambitious aim. In their first publication, the authors seemed to pay a divided worship between Keats and Wordsworth. There was much of the deep sense of beauty which enraptured the first, and not a little of that humane philosophic spirit by which the other saw excellencies even in the trivial and apparently mean. But they had now come to think for and to express themselves more independently ; and not a few of the ballads and lyrics accompanying the leading poem were of superior excellence, more especially "The Highland Group," "The Mountain Tombs," "Would I had Wist," and, above all, "The Two Voyagers,"—a most touching theme, exquisitely managed. It was probably her success in it which led Mary Howitt to the fortress of her main strength, ballad poetry, in which she has few cotemporary rivals, whether we regard her pictures of stern wild solitary nature, or of all that is placid, gentle,

and benignant in the supernatural. I have only to instance "The Hunter's Linn," and "A Tale of the Woods," as examples of her success in the former walk, and "The Fairies of Caldou Low" in the latter.

I hesitate not to say that I like her better in these than in her more ambitious attempt, "The Seven Temptations," fine as two of the series of stories are—"The Poor Scholar," and "The Sorrow of Theresa." Indeed the more simple, inartificial, and un aspiring that Mary Howitt is in her themes, the truer she ever is to herself and nature; and hence her success as a writer for the young. Her path there is different from that of the authors of the "Hymns for Infant Minds;" for her themes are those of natural observation, and innocent mirth, and playful fancy; and few things better in their way have ever been written than the following stanzas, which, although expressly meant for children, may be pondered over with advantage also "by children of a larger growth:"—

“ ‘ Will you walk into my parlour?’ said the spider to the fly,  
 ‘ ’Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy;  
 The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,  
 And I’ve got many curious things to show when you are there.’  
 ‘ Oh no, no,” said the little fly, ‘ to ask me is in vain,  
 For who goes up your winding stair can ne’er come down  
 again.’

‘ I’m sure you must be weary, dear, with soaring up so high;  
 Will you rest upon my little bed?’ said the spider to the fly;  
 ‘ There are pretty curtains drawn around; the sheets are fine  
 and thin,  
 And if you like to rest a while, I’ll snugly tuck you in!’  
 ‘ Oh no, no,’ said the little fly, ‘ for I’ve often heard it said,  
 They never, never wake again, who sleep upon your bed!’

Said the cunning spider to the fly—‘ Dear friend, what can  
 I do

To prove the warm affection I’ve always felt for you?

I have within my pantry good store of all that's nice ;  
I'm sure you're very welcome—will you please to take a  
slice?'

'Oh no, no,' said the little fly, 'kind sir, that cannot be,  
I've heard what's in your pantry, and I do not wish to see.'

'Sweet creature,' said the spider, 'you're witty and you're  
wise ;  
How handsome are your gauzy wings, how brilliant are your  
eyes !

I have a little looking-glass upon my parlour shelf,  
If you'll step in one moment, dear, you shall behold yourself.'  
'I thank you, gentle sir,' she said, 'for what you please to say,  
And bidding you good morning now, I'll call another day.'

The spider turned him round about, and went into his den,  
For well he knew the silly fly would soon come back again ;  
So he wove a subtle web in a little corner sly,  
And set his table ready to dine upon the fly.  
Then he came out to his door again, and merrily did sing  
'Come hither, hither, pretty fly, with the pearl and silver  
wing ;  
Your robes are green and purple—there's a crest upon your  
head ;  
Your eyes are like the diamond bright, but mine are dull as  
lead !'

Alas ! alas ! how very soon this silly little fly,  
Hearing his wily flattering words, came slowly flitting by ;  
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew,  
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and her green and purple  
hue—  
Thinking only of her crested head—poor foolish thing ! At  
last,  
Up jumped the cunning spider, and fiercely held her fast.  
He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,  
Within his little parlour—but she ne'er came out again !

And now, dear little children, who may this story read,  
To idle, silly, flattering words, I pray you ne'er give heed ;

Unto an evil counsellor close heart and ear and eye,  
And take a lesson from this tale of the spider and the fly."

There can be no surer proof of the genuineness of the poetical power possessed by Mary Howitt, than the fact that her finer pieces ever recur again and again to the memories of all imaginative readers. This can be only owing to their feminine tenderness, their earnest tone, their gentle music, and their simple but genuine nature. Her style is sometimes careless, and her stories inartificially put together; but we readily forget these and other deficiencies in the truth of her home scenes, and the lonely wildness of her moorland landscapes.

The artless simplicity of Mary Howitt is at direct antipodes to the stately elaboration of Mrs Norton: not that the author of "The Child of the Islands," and "The Dream," is an artificial writer, but that her sketches from nature, as well as of life and character, are of a kind totally dissimilar. Mary Howitt was constitutionally fanciful and imaginative; and the fault of her early pictures is, that all her plants have too much flower. When, on the contrary, we look at "The Sorrows of Rosalie," and "The Undying One," and compare these with the more matured and subsequent productions of Mrs Norton, it will be evident that her poetic powers have been greatly cherished and improved by education and culture, and by a careful study of the best models. In her tenderer moods she pitches on a key somewhat between Goldsmith and Rogers—with here the sunset glow of the first, and there the twilight softness of the latter: in her more passionate ones we have a reflex of Byron; but it is a reflex of the pathos, without the misanthropy of that great poet. Her ear for the modulation of verse is exquisite; and many of her lyrics and songs carry in them the characteristic of the ancient Douglasses, being alike "tender and true." It must be

owned, however, that individuality is not the most prominent feature of Mrs Norton's poetry.

As connected with this section of my subject, it would be unjust to pass over without mention the names of Lady Flora Hastings, of Harriet Drury, and Camilla Toulmin. In Lady Flora's dramatic fragments especially, there is a true power, which, had it continued to be cultivated, might have produced great things; and many of her original lyrics, as "The Rainbow," "The Cross of Constantine," "The Street of the Tombs," as well as her translations from the German and Italian, are replete with spirit and grace. "The Annesley" of Harriet Drury gives indication of poetic capabilities which require only maturer cultivation to secure her that place among the sister poets of England, which is assuredly within her reach: and for Camilla Toulmin may be claimed the praise of having been among the first to endeavour boldly to wed the revelations of modern science and art to the harmonies of verse; nor has she done this unsuccessfully in her poems, "The Real and Ideal," "Astrology and Alchemy," and "The Railway Whistle."

What Felicia Hemans was to Sir Walter Scott, Elizabeth Barrett is to Alfred Tennyson. In some degree they are reflexes; yet each has a high, peculiar, and speculative genius of their own. In her early writings, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was as lucid as Mary Howitt or Caroline Bowles, although her phraseology and style were always careless and disjointed, and her ear, alike for rhythm and rhyme, utterly untuned; but, in her literary progress, she has, like Thomas Carlyle and Emerson, been steadily becoming more and more inverted and involved, till she has bewildered her thoughts and her English in palpable obscurity and mysticism. To be aware of this we have only to contrast her early "Sonnets" with her latter; or her "Grave of Cowper" with her "Drama of Exile."

The general effect of Mrs Hemans' poetry may be compared to that of a Grecian temple perched on a green hill, in the open sunlight, and surrounded by its olive groves—a temple symmetric in its general design, and just in its particular portions, wherein are met elegance and grace and consummate art ; that of Mrs Browning, to a Gothic church, mossy and weather-stained, in a sequestered dell among gnarled old trees, overshadowing the grey tombstones of its venerable field of graves, with its pointed gables, its quaint niches, its grotesque corbels, and echoing aisles, its fretted worm-bored oak-work, and its faded velvet cushion brocaded with gold.

There is much of seriousness, nay, sadness, in the general tone of Mrs Browning's verse, and it abounds with solemn questionings ; but her speculations are for the most part, if not quite objectless, mere gropings and guessings in the dark. She has considerable inventiveness, yet without much variety, and almost nothing of art. Hence she has never given us, even for once, anything that can be regarded as either a finished portrait or picture, although she is always most successful when least ambitious—and her "Little Elie," and her "Bertha in the Lane," have something like proportion and individuality. She seems to satisfy herself with mere hasty sketches ; and even in them we have want of outline, haziness, or exaggeration. We have occasionally the germ of fine things ; but her blossoms, nipped by the canker-worm, seldom ripen into fruit. She seems never to dream of elaboration—her structures are mere walls without roofs ; or, if we have these, the window-frames are left unglazed ; shrubs grow in the front plot, but the wicket gate has been carelessly flung open, and the nibbling sheep have managed to make sad work with the flowers and evergreens. Her acquired knowledge is great ; so is her intellectual capacity : the only faculty imperfectly cultivated is her taste ; for her want of ear seems a natural and incur-

able defect. Hence it is that she is so capricious and uncertain, not only in the selection and management of her subjects, but also in her language and style. Her mannerisms amount to affectations; and too often her thoughts and images are crude, careless, and only half brought out. In her compositions she seems utterly to disregard correctness, combination, and elegance.

Mrs Hemans, above all female writers, was distinguished for her rich tones—the voice at once sweet and full—that carried them to the heart, awakening the feelings as well as the imagination. Mrs Browning speaks out in other accents—as of one oppressed with the weight of mortality, of some unutterable grief, and who longs for “the wings of a dove, to flee away and be at rest.” Her day knows nothing of summer sunshine rejoicing in its flowers and singing-birds; it is like that of cheerless November with its pallid low-hung sky, its drizzly rains, and its yellow leaves eddying in the breeze. Her song, half inarticulate, is often nothing more than a long wild wail, like the “Oolaloo” at an Irish funeral—as in “The Cry of the Children,” the most extraordinary and strikingly original of all Mrs Browning’s productions; or than mere *Æolian* warblings—as the seraphic choruses in the “Drama of Exile.” Gifted with a fine and peculiar genius, what Mrs Browning might have achieved, or may yet achieve, by concentration of thought and rejection of unworthy materials, it is impossible to say; but most assuredly she has hitherto marred the effect of much she has written by a careless self-satisfaction. Instead of being a comet that “from its horrid hair shakes pestilence and war,” she might have been, and I trust is destined yet to be, a constellation to twinkle for ever in silver beauty amid the blue serene. The materials of poetry seem lying heaped in plenty around her; but she either will not exert it, or her skill in putting them together sadly lacks tutoring. This defect many will suppose should have been over-



come by practice and experience. Sorry am I to say it has not been so. On the contrary, her faults, as I have lamented, have been degenerating into system. She has, year after year, been becoming more involved in style, more mystical in conception, and more transcendental in speculation. Instead of healthy strength we have morbid excitement, and what were originally mere peculiarities and mannerisms, appear to have grown into settled affectations.

The "importunate and heavy load" of the truth of the following stanzas from "The Cry of the Children" weighs on the heart like a nightmare,—on the imagination like a torture-scene by Spagnoletto.

"Do ye hear the children weeping, oh my brothers !  
 Ere the sorrow comes with years?  
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers',  
 'And *that* cannot stop their tears.

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,  
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,  
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows,  
 The young flowers are blowing towards the west ;

But the young, young children, oh my brothers !  
 They are weeping bitterly !  
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,  
 In the country of the free.

For all day the wheels are droning, turning—  
 Their wind comes in our faces,  
 Till our hearts turn—our heads with pulses burning—  
 And the walls turn in their places.

Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling—  
 Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall—  
 Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling—  
 All are turning, all the day, and we with all.

And all day the iron wheels are droning,  
 And sometimes we could pray,  
 'O ye wheels, (breaking out in a sad moaning,)  
 Stop—be silent for to-day !'

Ay, be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing  
 For a moment, mouth to mouth ;  
 Let them touch each other's hands in a fresh wreathing  
 Of their tender human youth !

Let them feel that this cold metallic motion  
 Is not all the life God fashions and reveals,  
 Let them prove their inward souls against the notion  
 That they live in you, or under you, O wheels !

Now tell the poor young children, oh my brothers !  
 To look up to Him and pray,  
 So the Blessed One, who blesseth all the others,  
 May bless them another day."

Richard Chenevix Trench, Professor of Divinity in University College, London, has something of Mrs Browning's recondite speculation, and love for the uncommon in thought and expression ; but these vagaries with him lie entirely on the surface, and, withal, are so slight, even as conceits, that they never interfere with his conceptions, for he is always eminently perspicuous. When we gaze into a clear translucent pool, and observe distinctly the sand, shells, and pebbles at the bottom, we are apt to form a very erroneous estimate of its depth. It is often so with Mr Trench's poetry, where the profound seems to assume the guise of the simple and unadorned. That he is something of a mannerist is not to be disputed, but seldom disagreeably so, from a classical eagerness, an over-fastidious anxiety to give his phrases their highest polish ; so, from his "Justin Martyr," through his "Elegiac Poems," down to those "From Eastern Sources," his course towards compositional excellence has been

steady and evident. In the last mentioned volume especially, there are several poems of exquisite beauty, whose music lingers on the memory, and refuses to be forgotten,—as “The Banished Kings,” “Orpheus and the Syrens,” “Moses and Jethro,” and “The Suppliant,”—above all the last, than which I scarcely know anything finer in its way.

“All night the lonely suppliant prayed,  
 All night his earnest crying made,  
 Till, standing by his side, at morn,  
 The Tempter said in bitter scorn,  
 ‘Oh, peace! what profit do you gain  
 From empty words and babblings vain?  
 “Come, Lord—oh come!” you cry alway;  
 You pour your heart out night and day;  
 Yet still no murmur of reply,—  
 No voice that answers, “Here am I.”’

Then sank the stricken heart in dust,  
 That word had withered all its trust;  
 No strength retained it now to pray,  
 While Faith and Hope had fled away;  
 And ill that mourner now had fared,  
 Thus by the Tempter’s art ensnared,  
 But that at length beside his bed  
 His sorrowing angel stood, and said,—  
 ‘Doth it repent thee of thy love,  
 That never now is heard above  
 Thy prayer, that now not any more  
 It knocks at heaven’s gate as before?’

‘I am cast out—I find no place,  
 No hearing at the throne of grace,  
 “Come Lord—oh come!” I cry alway,  
 I pour my heart out night and day,  
 Yet never, until now, have won  
 The answer—“Here am I, my son.”’

‘Oh, dull of heart! enclosed doth lie  
 In each “Come, Lord!” an “Here am I.”’

Thy love, thy longing are not thine—  
 Reflections of a love divine :  
 The very prayer to thee was given,  
 Itself a messenger from heaven.  
 Whom God rejects, they are not so ;  
 Strong bands are round them in their woe ;  
 Their hearts are bound with bands of brass  
 That sigh or crying cannot pass.  
 All treasures did the Lord impart  
 To Pharaoh, save a contrite heart :  
 All other gifts unto his foes  
 He freely gives, nor grudging knows ;  
 But love's sweet smart and costly pain  
 A treasure to his friends remain.' ”

Of late years, Professor Trench has greatly distinguished himself by his theological treatises, said to be among the best and most learned of our age, and to have almost forsaken “the flowery paths of poetry.” But the simultaneous cultivation of the intellect and fancy, as he himself well knows, is anything but incompatible ; and an occasional saunter in his early favourite paths might not only be refreshing to himself, but might enable him yet to twine a few more bouquets quite worthy of public acceptance.

Along with the “bright particular stars” which illumined our literary hemisphere in the first quarter of the present century, there were many detached ones—less lustrous, perhaps, and dazzling—but which also, in “their golden urns,” drew the light of inspiration. My limits, however, will not allow of more than a general and cursory notice of these ; and I must even restrict myself to a few of the most prominent, from whose pages the student of poetry may more certainly anticipate delight.

Thomas Pringle, the author of the “Autumnal Excursion” and the “African Sketches,” possessed considerable scholarship, an elegant taste, and a certain

racy vigour, occasionally amounting to power. His verses naturally divide themselves into two sections,—those relating to the scenery and traditions, the sentiments and associations of his native Scotland; and those composed amid the far-stretching wilds beyond the Cape, where the elephant comes down to drink at the cane-marshes, and where the fox-chase is exchanged for the lion-hunt. For elegance, elevation, and purity of style, it would be difficult to point out many things, in the octosyllabic measure, superior to the “Autumnal Excursion,” descriptive of Teviotdale, and of the pastoral and pure associations by which it was linked to the mind of boyhood; and several of his songs and sonnets breathe alike of the fire and tenderness which hovered over the Border districts, from the days of the old “Flowers of the Forest” and “Johnny Armstrong,” down to those of Scott and Leyden; but his “African Sketches” are maturer in thought and general power; and, besides, are more striking, both from the novelty of the situations depicted, and the imposing grandeur of the scenery described. The finest of these are “The Bechuana Boy,” which unites Doric simplicity with classic finish; and the verses, “Afar in the Desert,” whose strange wild music is said to have possessed a charm of fascination even for the ear and heart of Coleridge.

Although not to the same extent as Burns or Bloomfield, as Hogg or Cunningham, John Clare has also just claims to be regarded as a true poet,—the wild pea being a flower in its way, as well as the statelier moss-rose. His pretensions, however, are of the humblest: he has no imagination, and exceedingly little either of the inventive or the constructive faculty, and may be said to stand in much the same relation to an epic poet, that a limner of fruit and dead-game pieces does to an historical artist. But he has nature and observation; and what he does in his own unpretending way is done

accurately and well. We feel ever that he has seen with his own eyes, and that he describes from his own emotions: he gives us nothing at second-hand; so, if not a high, he is ever a true and an original painter. There is a simple nature about many of his pieces which is exceedingly touching; and had not something of the true inspiration burned within him, the light of his gentle genius could never have broken through the mass of encompassing darkness which seemed so helplessly to shroud his early fate,—for the prime of his life was absorbed in toils and privations sufficient to have ground ordinary spirits to the dust. The marvel is, that he did what he has done.

“The moving accident was not his trade;  
To stir the blood he had no ready arts;  
'Twas his alone, reclined in rural shade,  
To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts;

and he did so with a true fresh nature, if only with a rustic art.

Bernard Barton, like his predecessor John Scott of Amwell, whom he somewhat resembled in genius, first attracted attention principally from the novelty of one of his sober sect giving utterance to his emotions in verse: but he had merit also of a certain kind; and he continued to sustain the respectable measure of popularity acquired by his first appearance in a series of poems, each characterised by the same observant views of man and nature, the same correct sentiment, and the same mild cheerfulness of tone. Although, in the warp and woof of his loom, there might be observed a thread or so of egotism, it was not glaringly obtrusive. His chief fault was diffuseness. He wrote fluently, and was thereby induced to write a great deal too much; for, had he elaborated more, he would have used the pruning-knife with greater freedom. One indication of good

taste Barton uniformly exhibited,—that of adapting his tone and style to his subject. He is sometimes even striking and picturesque, as in his “Solitary Tomb,” his “Evening Primrose,” and the verses to “The Ivy;” but he is seldom bold or varied, and, in general, rather satisfies than surprises the reader. He wanted strength and originality to float the succession of volumes which he from time to time unhesitatingly launched forth for public favour; but from the unweeded garden a bouquet might be culled, sweet in its perfume and varied in its hues of simple beauty.

Thomas Haynes Bayley was the disciple of another school, more refined in feeling and sentiment, yet not deficient either in truth or nature—as far, at least, as these appertained to the atmosphere of the drawing-room. His first appearances in “Rough Sketches of Bath, by Q. in the Corner,” were little else than clever imitations of Anstey; and, for several after years, he simply held the reputation of a smart versifier. The power of his delineations and the tone of his sentiments, however, deepened; and by his latter compositions, remarkable for their taste and elegance, he unquestionably elevated himself into the poetical ranks. So admirably, indeed, did a number of his lyrics harmonise with music, that they attained a popularity second only to those of Burns and Moore. He possessed a playful fancy, a practised ear, a refined taste, and a sentiment which ranged pleasantly from the fanciful to the pathetic, without, however, strictly attaining either the highly imaginative or the deeply passionate; and it is difficult to say in which vein he was the more felicitous—or whether his “Oh, no, we never mention her,” or his “I’d be a Butterfly born in a bower,” has had the wider circle of admirers. Between these extremes there was a chain of sentiment “in linked sweetness long drawn out,” which he not infelicitously festooned with the flowers of song. In

comparison with the general tribe of verse-mongers for music, Bayley might well be regarded as a "Triton among the minnows;" for I know of nothing so utterly discreditable to British taste as the unmitigated nonsense rhymes, the despicable trash, which night after night seems to be listened to with satisfaction in our drawing-rooms and public places, as poetical accompaniments to fashionable music.

To a taste still more fastidious and elaborate, Alaric A. Watts united a vein of pathos probably deeper and more direct. His poetry lies somewhere between that of Campbell and Mrs Hemans; but he has his own decided and distinctive marks, whether we look to his mode of regarding subjects, or his style of treating them. He is always elegant and refined, yet natural; and looks on carelessness, as every man of taste and accomplishment should, as a vice unworthy of an artist; for poetry assuredly requires the learned skill, intuitive as that may occasionally seem, as well as the teeming fancy. In his "Poetic Sketches," an early work, as well as in his more recent "Lyrics of the Heart," Alaric Watts has given abundant proofs, if not of high creative strength, of gentle pathos, of cultivated intellect, and an eye and ear sensitively alive to all the genial impulses of nature, of "home-bred delights and heartfelt happiness."

Not that we have not occasionally indications of higher powers, which their author could put forth, had he so chosen, but from which he has abstained, and wisely—choosing rather to paint the stream as it passes through pastoral valleys, and by the garden hedges of honey-suckled homesteads, than its foaming descent from the mountain-sides, and its sullen pools amid the gloomy overhanging rocks. Among the finest of the lyrics of Alaric Watts are "The Death of the First-Born," "To a Sleeping Child," "Kirstall Abbey Revisited," "For Ever Thine," and "We met when Life and Love



were New"—although no piece has received the sanction of his publication, unless stamped by some peculiar and characteristic beauty. The following verses "To a Child blowing Bubbles," are about a fair average of his powers:—

"Thrice happy babe ! what radiant dreams are thine,  
As thus thou bid'st thine air-born bubbles soar ;—  
Who would not Wisdom's choicest gifts resign  
To be, like thee, a careless child once more ?

To share thy simple sports and sinless glee :  
Thy breathless wonder, thy unfeigned delight,  
As, one by one, those sun-touched glories flee,  
In swift succession, from thy straining sight ;

To feel a power within himself to make,  
Like thee, a rainbow whereso'er he goes ;  
To dream of sunshine, and like thee to wake  
To brighter visions, from his charmed repose ;—

Who would not give his all of worldly lore,  
The hard-earned fruits of many a toil and care,—  
Might he but thus the faded past restore,  
Thy guileless thoughts and blissful ignorance share !

Yet life hath bubbles too, that soothe awhile  
The sterner dreams of man's maturer years ;  
Love, Friendship, Fortune, Fame by turns beguile,  
But melt 'neath Truth's Ithuriel touch to tears.

Thrice happy child ! a brighter lot is thine ;  
What new illusion ere can match the first ?  
*We* mourn to see each cherished hope decline ;  
*Thy* mirth is loudest when thy bubbles burst."

The genius of T. K. Hervey—for he has genius at once pathetic and refined—is not unallied to that of Pringle and Watts, but with a dash of Thomas Moore. He writes uniformly with taste and elaboration, polishing the careless and rejecting the crude ; and had he

addressed himself more earnestly and unreservedly to the task of composition, I have little doubt, from several specimens he has occasionally exhibited, that he might have occupied a higher and more distinguished place in our poetical literature than he can be said to have attained. His "Australia," and several of his lyrics, were juvenile pledges of future excellence, which maturity can scarcely be said to have fully redeemed.

In the lottery of literature—for it seems to be in some respects a lottery as well as life, in so far as immediate success goes—Charles Wolfe has been one of the few who have drawn the prize of probable immortality from a casual gleam of inspiration thrown over a single poem, consisting of only a few stanzas; and these, too, little more than a spirited version from the prose of another. But the lyric is indeed full of fervour and freshness; and his triumph is not to be grudged. The attention of the author was early withdrawn from literature to his clerical duties, to which he unreservedly devoted himself—and he died young; but there is abundant evidence in his other early verses of a fine genius, which, if it had been continued to be cultivated, could scarcely have failed to have borne other rich fruits. This is sufficiently attested by several short pieces and fragments which he left behind, and more especially by the verses—

"If I had thought thou couldst have died,  
I might not weep for thee,"

which, in elegance and tender earnestness, are worthy of either Campbell or Byron. The "Ode on the Burial Sir John Moore" went directly to the heart of the nation, and it is likely to remain for ever enshrined there.

The poetical reputation of Herbert Knowles—a protégé of Southey's, who died at nineteen, may also be said to rest on one short poem—his "Verses written in

the Churchyard of Richmond ;” and so does that of Jane Taylor on her “Squire’s Pew,” a lyric of exquisite originality and beauty, which I take some credit to myself for having rescued from comparative obscurity.

“ A slanting ray of evening light  
 Shoots through the yellow pane ;  
 It makes the faded crimson bright,  
 And gilds the fringe again ;  
 The window’s Gothic framework falls  
 In oblique shadows on the walls.

And since those trappings first were new,  
 How many a cloudless day,  
 To rob the velvet of its hue,  
 Has come and passed away ;  
 How many a setting sun hath made  
 That curious lattice-work of shade.

Crumbled beneath the hillock green  
 The cunning hand must be,  
 That carved this fretted door, I ween,  
 Acorn, and fleur-de-lis ;  
 And now the worm hath done her part  
 In mimicking the chisel’s art.

In days of yore (as now we call,)  
 When the first James was king,  
 The courtly knight from yonder hall  
 His train did hither bring,  
 All seated round, in order due,  
 With broidered suit and buckled shoe.

On damask cushions decked with fringe  
 All reverently they knelt ;  
 Prayer-books with brazen hasp and hinge,  
 In ancient English spelt,  
 Each holding in a lily hand  
 Responsive to the priest’s command.

Now, streaming down the vaulted aisle,  
 The sunbeam, long and lone,  
 Illumes the characters a while,  
 Of their inscription stone ;  
 And there, in marble hard and cold,  
 The knight with all his train behold.

Outstretched together are exprest  
 He and my lady fair,  
 With hands uplifted on the breast,  
 In attitude of prayer ;  
 Long-visaged, clad in armour, he—  
 With ruffled arm and boddice she.

Set forth in order as they died,  
 Their numerous offspring bend,  
 Devoutly kneeling side by side,  
 As if they intend  
 For past omissions to atone,  
 By saying endless prayers in stone.

Those mellow days are past and dim,  
 But generations new,  
 In regular descent from him,  
 Have filled the stately pew,—  
 And in the same succession go  
 To occupy the vaults below.

And now the polished modern squire,  
 And his gay train appear,  
 Who duly to the hall retire,  
 A season every year ;  
 And fill the seats with belle and beau,  
 As 'twas so many years ago.

Perchance, all thoughtless as they tread  
 The hollow-sounding floor  
 Of that dark house of kindred dead,  
 Which shall, as heretofore,  
 In turn receive to silent rest  
 Another and another guest :

The feathered hearse and sable train,  
In all their wonted state,  
Shall wind along the village lane,  
And stand before the gate ;  
Brought many a distant county through,  
To join the final rendezvous.

And when the race is swept away,  
All to their dusty beds,  
Still shall the mellow evening ray  
Shine gaily o'er their heads ;  
While other faces, fresh and new,  
Shall fill the squire's deserted pew !”

The same may be said of two beautiful lyrical gems, which many years ago I stumbled on in a stray number of the “Gentlemen’s Magazine” for 1809—“The Dripping Cupid” from Anacreon, and the carol, “When shall we Three meet again ?” which have since found a place in school collections, and in a thousand young memories. Did not my limits almost wholly preclude, I should have liked to have here dilated at some length on the merits of not a few poets who justly demand honourable notice, as connected with this particular era ; but I can do no more than emphatically allude to Dale, and Conder, and Keble, and Huie, and Knox, and Edmonstone, and Lyte, who have worthily devoted themselves to sacred subjects ; to Charles Swain, whose poems are distinguished by delicacy of feeling, as well as generous and manly sentiment ; to John Malcolm, who always wrote with taste and grace ; to Carrington, whose “Banks of the Tamar,” and “Dartmoor,” are full of fine descriptive power ; to Sir Martin Archer Shee, whose “Rhymes on Art” were classically elegant ; to Henry Neele, who possessed much of the pathos and sensibility of Kirke White ; to George Darley, whose “*Sylva, or May Queen*” and “*Errors of Ecstacie*,” were characterised by exuberant fancy and fine harmony of versification, although

marred by improbability of incident and fantastical views of life; to Bowring, whose "many-languaged lore" culled poetical delights for us from all the corners of Europe, and whose own original verses were ever spirited and fine; to Winthrop Mackworth Praed, the coadjutor of Macaulay in "The Etonian," whose serio-comic legends were coloured with fresh and flowing fancy, and who, in a great degree, anticipated both Hood and Ingoldsby in a peculiar comic vein; to Charles Chalklin, whose "Ghost of the Oratory," and lyrical themes, overflow with poetic suggestion, and are often of high speculative beauty, sadly defective though they are rendered by redundance of imagery and want of keeping; to Abraham Heraud, whose "Judgment of the Flood," and "Descent into Hell," although over-ambitious in style and language, display power and imagination; to R. W. Jameson, whose "Nimrod" is a daring conception, worked out in many passages with vigour and effect; and to Edwin Atherstone, whose "Last Days of Herculaneum," and "Fall of Nineveh," although poems of amazing copiousness and considerable invention, are not great poems. In them we have intellectual pomp rather than intellectual strength—a prodigality of blossoms, but a scarcity of fruit. Many of Atherstone's pictures, however, taken by themselves, more especially his battle-scenes, are striking and animated; but he lacks the ideal—the intuitive touch which alone can give strict individuality, and which great masters only possess.

## LECTURE VI.

### PART SECOND.

Ballad-historic poetry.—J. G. Lockhart : Spanish ballads : his *Napoleon*.—T. B. Macaulay ; Lays of Ancient Rome, *Lake Regillus*.—Professor Aytoun ; Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers, *Battle of Killiecrankie*.—Mrs Stuart Menteth, Mrs Ogilvy, Miss Agnes Strickland.—Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer : his poems and translations.—Rev. John Moultrie ; stanzas, “ *My Scottish Lassie*.”—Scottish and Irish poets of the period.—*Dirge* by Mrs Downing.—The Metaphysic-romantic school.—Alfred Tennyson ; Ballads, Princess, and *In Memoriam*.—Specimens, *Oriana* and *Stanzas*.—R. M. Milnes and Dr Charles Mackay.—Robert Browning ; Paracelsus, Sordello, Bells and Pomegranates.—John Sterling.—Philip James Bayley ; Festus, The Angel World : extract, *Dream of Decay*.—Mysticism and obscurity the pervading faults of our recent poetry.—Concluding remarks.

IN some brief introductory remarks on the poetry of Scott, I referred to the earliest forms of national verse—the song and ballad ; the former more particularly relating to sentiment, the latter to action. Indeed, a ballad may be defined to be the simplest shape of narrative verse ; nor does it detract much from the perfect strictness of this definition, that the characters should be made occasionally to moralise and reflect. The ballads of one nation necessarily differ widely from those of another in scenery and manners, as well as in prevailing local or natural associations : but, with all, simplicity of style and feeling is a requisite as well as a uniform characteristic.

In 1823, John Gibson Lockhart, previously distinguished as the author of "Valerius," "Adam Blair," "Reginald Dalton," and "Matthew Wald," published his translations from the ancient Spanish; and although most of these mediæval ballads were wonderfully fine in themselves, they certainly lost nothing—as the shield of Martinus Scriblerus is said to have done—from being subjected to the tact and skill of modern furbishing. On the contrary, what was tame he inspired; what was lofty gained additional grandeur; and even the tender—as in the lay of "Count Alarços"—grew still more pathetic beneath his touch. The translations consisted of three classes—the Historical, the Romantic, and the Moorish; and among the most striking are "The Avenging Childe," "The Seven Heads," the Bull-fight of Granada," "Zara's Ear-rings," and, beyond all, "Count Alarços and the Infanta Soliza," than which, as rendered by Mr Lockhart, no finer ballad of its kind—more gushingly natural, or more profoundly pathetic—probably exists in the poetry of any nation.

These translations derive, as I have said, not a little of their excellence from Mr Lockhart's being himself a poet of fine genius—clear in his conceptions, and masculine in execution. His pictures have all the distinctness of an autumn landscape, outlined on the horizon by an unclouded morning sun. What he might have done had he continued scaling the heights of Parnassus, there could have been little difficulty in predicating; and most assuredly the poetical literature of our age lost much by his desertion of the lyre, who might have been one of its great masters—whether he had chosen to tread in the steps of "Dan Chaucer" or of "Glorious John;" for he could wield at will the graphic brush of the painter of "Palamon and Arcite," as well as etch with the needle that outlined "Absalom and Achitophel." Many of Lockhart's scattered verses are exquisitely fine, and range from the genially humorous of "Captain



Paton’s Lament,” to the majestically solemn of his “Napoleon”—which latter alone would have for ever stamped their author a poet of a high order:—

“The mighty sun had just gone down  
     Into the chambers of the deep ;  
 The ocean birds had upward flown,  
     Each in his cave to sleep ;  
 And silent was the island shore,  
     And breathless all the broad red sea,  
 And motionless beside the door  
     Our solitary tree.  
 Our only tree, our ancient palm,  
     Whose shadow sleeps our door beside,  
 Partook the universal calm  
     When Buonaparte died.  
 An ancient man, a stately man,  
     Came forth beneath the spreading tree,  
 His silent thoughts I could not scan,  
     His tears I needs must see.  
 A trembling hand had partly covered  
     The old man’s weeping countenance,  
 Yet something o’er his sorrow hovered,  
     That spake of war and France ;  
 Something that spake of other days,  
     When trumpets pierced the kindling air,  
 And the keen eye could firmly gaze  
     Through battle’s crimson glare.  
 Said I, ‘Perchance this faded hand,  
     When life beat high, and hope was young,  
 By Lodi’s wave, or Syria’s sand,  
     The bolt of death hath flung.  
 Young Buonaparte’s battle-cry  
     Perchance hath kindled this old cheek ;  
 It is no shame that he should sigh—  
     His heart is like to break !  
 He hath been with him young and old :  
     He climbed with him the Alpine snow ;  
 He heard the cannon when they rolled  
     Along the river Po.

His soul was as a sword, to leap  
     At his accustomed leader's word;  
 I love to see the old man weep—  
     He knew no other lord.  
 As if it were but yesternight,  
     This man remembers dark Eylau;  
 His dreams are of the eagle's flight  
     Victorious long ago.  
 The memories of worser time  
     Are all as shadows unto him;  
 Fresh stands the picture of his prime—  
     The later trace is dim.  
 I entered, and I saw him lie  
     Within the chamber all alone;  
 I drew near very solemnly  
     To dead Napoleon.  
 He was not shrouded in a shroud—  
     He lay not like the vulgar dead—  
 Yet all of haughty, stern, and proud,  
     From his pale brow was fled.  
 He had put harness on to die,  
     The eagle star shone on his breast,  
 His sword lay bare his pillow nigh,  
     The sword he liked the best.  
 But calm, most calm, was all his face,  
     A solemn smile was on his lips,  
 His eyes were closed in pensive grace—  
     A most serene eclipse!  
 Ye would have said, some sainted sprite  
     Had left its passionless abode—  
 Some man, whose prayer at morn and night,  
     Had duly risen to God.  
 What thoughts had calmed his dying breast  
     (For calm he died) cannot be known;  
 Nor would I wound a warrior's rest,—  
     Farewell, Napoleon!"

Mr Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" differed initially from Mr Lockhart's Spanish translations in this, that the latter worked from the native materials,

which he refined and improved ; the former simply from the general scope and spirit of ancient legends. Taking it for granted, according to the very probable theory of Niebuhr, that the semi-fabulous traditions of all infant nations must have existed primarily in a metrical form, he re-transferred some of the portions of early Roman history back into the shape which might be supposed to have been their original one ere historicised by Livy, and this with consummate imaginative and artistic ability. He is entirely of the Homer, the Chaucer, and Scott school, his poetry being thoroughly that of action ; and sentiment is seldom ever more than interjectionally introduced—the utmost fidelity being thus shown to the essential characteristics of that species of composition which he has so triumphantly illustrated.

The four subjects selected by Mr Macaulay are those of “ Horatius Cocles,” “ The Battle of the Lake Regillus,” “ Virginia,” and “ The Prophecy of Capys ;” and he has clothed them in a drapery of homely grandeur, yet at the same time with a picturesqueness of effect, which carries us back to Homer in his wars of Troy, and in his wanderings of Ulysses. Mr Macaulay has evidently sedulously endeavoured to preserve a thorough distinctive nationality, not only in the materials, natural and historical, but in the very spirit of his different legends ; and he has wonderfully succeeded in this delicate, difficult, and laborious task. In vividness of outline, in graphic breadth, and in rapidity of narrative, he approaches the author of “ The Lay ” and “ Marmion ”—like the mighty minstrel, unreservedly throwing himself into and identifying himself with his subject. Probably the finest, at least the most poetical, of the four legends, is “ The Prophecy of Capys,” which breathes the very spirit of antique simplicity, and is encrusted with such a thick-falling shower of local allusions as to stamp it with the air of truth. “ The

Battle of the Bridge" is, beyond the others, full of heroic action and energy ; and "Virginia" is touching, from the very simplicity of its majestic sentiment—so childlike and yet so noble.

Mr Macaulay is another of the few poets who have written too little by far. The fragment of "The Armada" is like a Torso of Hercules—redolent of graphic power ; and "The Battle of Ivry," although scarcely equal to it, is also remarkable for its masculine conception and disdain of petty ornament.

The following placid descriptive sketch from "The Battle of the Lake Regillus" contrasts finely with the ancient stirring associations of the scene :—

" Now on the place of slaughter  
     Are cots and sheepfolds seen,  
 And rows of vines, and fields of wheat,  
     And apple-orchards green :  
 The swine crush the big acorns  
     That fall from Corne's oaks ;  
 Upon the turf, by the fair fount,  
     The reaper's pottage smokes.  
 The fisher baits his angle,  
     The hunter twangs his bow,  
 Little they think on those strong limbs  
     That moulder deep below.  
 Little they think how sternly  
     That day the trumpets pealed ;  
 How, in the slippery swamp of blood,  
     Warrior and war-horse reeled ;  
 How wolves came with fierce gallop,  
     And crows on eager wings,  
 To tear the flesh of captains,  
     And peck the eyes of kings ;  
 How thick the dead lay scattered  
     Under the Portian height ;  
 How, through the gates of Tusculum,  
     Raved the wild stream of flight :

And how the Lake Regillus  
 Bubbled with crimson foam,  
 What time the Thirty Cities  
 Came forth to war with Rome."

Professor Aytoun has selected his ballad themes from striking incidents and from stirring scenes in our mediæval Scottish history—some remote as the field of Flodden, others as recent as that of Drum Mossie Muir; and he has thrown over them the light of an imagination at once picturesque and powerful. He has allowed himself a wider range of illustration than either Lockhart or Macaulay thought consistent with the mere ballad—occasionally ascending from its essential simplicity into a loftier and more ambitious strain of composition, midway between the classical and romantic; and probably the peculiar nature of some of his subjects, for adequate management, entitled him to do so. The *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*—that burning, irrepresible energy of character which, whether directed towards good or towards evil, has ever distinguished our country—breathes throughout all his Lays, and lends even stern fact the etherealising hues of fiction. We are carried by them back to the wild and ever-changing and tempest-shrouded days of old, when every man's hand was on his sword, and every man's house was his castle; and we so enter into their daring, adventurous, and reckless spirit, that forgetting Elihu Burritt and universal peace associations, and these prosaic Cobdenish times, we are half inclined, Quixotishly, and without weighing the consequences, to exclaim, in the excited spirit of worthy Jonathan Oldbuck in "The Antiquary"—

"Sound, sound the trumpet, wake the fife,  
 And to a slumbering world proclaim,  
 A single hour of glorious life  
 Is worth an age without a name!"

Regarded by themselves, as separate poems, the finest of these "Lays," in my opinion, are the "Edinburgh after Flodden," "The Burial-March of Dundee," and "The Execution of Montrose;" although it is difficult to conceive anything more touching than the visionary musings of "Charles Edward at Versailles," or grander and more animated than the battle-sketch of Killiecrankie. The latter is like a picture by Wouvermans:—

" Burning eye and flushing cheek  
 Told the clansmen's fierce emotion,  
     And they harder drew their breath ;  
 For their souls were strong within them,  
     Stronger than the grasp of death.  
 Soon we heard a challenge-trumpet  
     Sounding in the Pass below,  
 And the distant tramp of horses,  
     And the voices of the foe :  
 Down we crouched amid the bracken,  
     Till the Lowland ranks drew near,  
 Panting like the hounds in summer,  
     When they scent the stately deer.  
 From the dark defile emerging,  
     Next we saw the squadrons come,  
 Leslie's foot and Leven's troopers  
     Marching to the tuck of drum ;  
 Through the scattered wood of birches,  
     O'er the broken ground and heath,  
 Wound the long battalion slowly,  
     Till they gained the field beneath ;  
 Then we bounded from our covert.—  
     Judge how looked the Saxons then,  
 When they saw the rugged mountain  
     Start to life with armèd men !  
 Like a tempest down the ridges  
     Swept the hurricane of steel,  
 Rose the slogan of Macdonald—  
     Flashed the broadsword of Locheil !

Vainly sped the withering volley  
 'Mongst the foremost of our band—  
 On we poured until we met them  
 Foot to foot, and hand to hand.  
 Horse and man went down like drift-wood  
 When the floods are black at Yule,  
 And their carcasses are whirling  
 In the Garry's deepest pool:  
 Horse and man went down before us—  
 Living foe there tarried none  
 On the field of Killiecrankie,  
 When that stubborn fight was done !”

Among the many fine miscellaneous lyrics of Professor Aytoun, the finest to my taste are “The Old Camp,” which has a strange twilight mysterious interest about it; “Ænone,” full of classic feeling and grace; and “The Buried Flower,” most musical, most melancholy, in its record of sweet and bitter recollections. I have also to mention the excellency of his translations from the ancient and modern Greek, as well as of the minor poems of Goethe, whereof he has admirably managed to preserve the native characteristics, as well as the spirit and vitality. The following stanzas, for instance, scarcely read like a transfusion of sentiment from one language into another:—

“A violet blossomed on the lea,  
 Half hidden from the eye,  
 As fair a flower as you might see;  
 When there came tripping by  
 A shepherd maiden fair and young,  
 Lightly, lightly o'er the lea;  
 Care she knew not, and she sung  
 Merrily !

‘Oh were I but the fairest flower  
 That blossoms on the lea,  
 If only for one little hour,  
 That she might gather me—

Clasp me in her bonny breast !  
 Thought the little flower.  
 ‘ Oh ! that in it I might rest  
 But an hour ! ’

Lack-a-day ! up came the lass,  
 Heeded not the violet—  
 Trod it down into the grass ;  
 Though it died, ’twas happy yet.  
 ‘ Trodden down although I lie,  
 Yet my death is very sweet—  
 For I cannot choose but die  
 At her feet ! ’ ”

I must here also mention the “ Ballads and Lays from Scottish History ” by Norval Clyne, a young author, and full of promise ; “ The Book of Highland Minstrelsy ” by Mrs Ogilvy, in which is beautifully reflected much of the poetry of the Celtic character, and which gives evidence of an imaginative, an energetic, and an accomplished mind, as well as does also her last work, “ The Legends of Tuscany ; ” and the “ Lays of the Kirk and Covenant, ” by Mrs Stuart Menteth, which, although occasionally perhaps too sketchy and unelaborate, are pregnant with fancy and feeling—as indicated, more especially, by those entitled “ The Child of James Melville, ” and “ The Martyrs of Wigtoun. ”

The “ Historic Scenes and Sketches ” of Miss Agnes Strickland require also, in justice, to be noticed here. Many of them are fine and spirited ; hurrying on the reader by that glow and animation of style, and that picturesqueness of description, characteristic of the historian of the Queens of England and of Scotland.

The brilliant fame of Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer as a novelist, and as a dramatic writer, has tended much to eclipse and disparage his appearances as a poet. In the two former departments he ranks deservedly as a magnate : in the last, his status is more questionable,



although, I confess, this is a thing rather to be felt than explained. He constantly touches the confines of success, and stands before the gate—but the “Open Sesame!” comes not to his lips. Perhaps it is that, in his themes, we have rather able and eloquent treatment than that colouring glow of imagination which has been termed inspiration. With fine descriptive powers, and with boundless range of illustration, there is a want of reliance on simple nature—of that fusion of the poet in his subject, which can alone give that subject consecration—the poetic art, without the poetic vision; and this defect is apparent in all his verse, from his early “Weeds and Wildflowers,” “O’Niel the Rebel,” “Ismael,” and “The Siamese Twins,” down to his “Eva, or the Ill-Omened Marriage,” his “Modern Timon,” and his more elaborate and ambitious “King Arthur.” His translations of the poems and ballads of Schiller are, however, justly held in estimation among scholars, for their spirit and fidelity.

The Rev. John Moultrie, a poet of elegant mind and of considerable pathetic power, should have been before mentioned, as more strictly belonging to the time of Heber, Milman, and Croly, and as a coadjutor of Macaulay and Mackworth Praed in “The Etonian.” His “Godiva” is said to have been a great favourite with the late Mr Gifford of the “Quarterly”—a not very lenient judge; and many of his lyrics overflow with sentiment and feeling. His verses on his “Brother’s Grave” are particularly striking; and I am not aware of any prototype for the following fine fresh stanzas:—

“Here’s to thee, my Scottish lassie! here’s a hearty health to thee,  
 For thine eye so bright, thy form so light, and thy step so firm and free;  
 For all thine artless elegance, and all thy native grace,  
 To the music of thy mirthful voice, and the sunshine of thy face;

For thy guileless look and speech sincere, yet sweet as  
speech can be—

Here's a health, my Scottish lassie! here's a hearty health  
to thee!

Here's to thee, my Scottish lassie! Though my glow of  
youth is o'er;

And I, as once I felt and dreamed, must feel and dream no  
more;

Though the world, with all its frosts and storms, has chilled  
my soul at last,

And genius with the foodful looks of youthful friendship  
passed;

Though my path is dark and lonely, now, o'er this world's  
dreary sea,

Here's a health, my Scottish lassie! here's a hearty health  
to thee!

Here's to thee, my Scottish lassie! though I know that not  
for me

Is thine eye so bright, thy form so light, and thy step so  
firm and free;

Though thou, with cold and careless looks, wilt often pass  
me by,

Unconscious of my swelling heart and of my wistful eye;

Though thou wilt wed some Highland love, nor waste one  
thought on me,

Here's a health, my Scottish lassie, here's a hearty health  
to thee!

Here's to thee, my Scottish lassie! when I meet thee in the  
throng

Of merry youths and maidens dancing lightsomely along,

I'll dream away an hour or twain, still gazing on thy form

As it flashes through the baser crowd, like lightning through  
a storm;

And I, perhaps, shall touch thy hand, and share thy looks  
of glee,

And for once, my Scottish lassie, dance a giddy dance with  
thee!

Here’s to thee, my Scottish lassie! I shall think of thee at  
even,

When I see its first and fairest star come smiling up through  
heaven;

I shall hear thy sweet and touching voice in every wind that  
grieves,

As it whirls from the abandoned oak its withered autumn  
leaves;

In the gloom of the wild forest, in the stillness of the sea,  
I shall think, my Scottish lassie, I shall often think of thee!

Here’s to thee, my Scottish lassie! In my sad and lonely  
hours,

The thought of thee comes o’er me like the breath of dis-  
tant flowers:

Like the music that enchants mine ear, the sights that bless  
mine eye,

Like the verdure of the meadow, like the azure of the sky,  
Like the rainbow in the evening, like the blossoms on the  
tree,

Is the thought, my Scottish lassie! is the lonely thought  
of thee.

Here’s to thee, my Scottish lassie! Though my muse must  
soon be dumb,

(For graver thoughts and duties with my graver years are  
come,)

Though my soul must burst the bonds of earth, and learn  
to soar on high,

And to look on this world’s follies with a calm and sober eye;  
Though the merry wine must seldom flow, the revel cease  
for me,

Still to thee, my Scottish lassie! still I’ll drink a health to  
thee!

Here’s a health, my Scottish lassie! here’s a parting health  
to thee!

May thine be still a cloudless lot, though it be far from me!  
May still thy laughing eye be bright, and open still thy brow,  
Thy thoughts as pure, thy speech as free, thy heart as light  
as now!

And whatsoe'er my after fate, my dearest toast shall be—  
Still a health, my Scottish lassie ! still a hearty health to  
thee ! ”

Although the three great portions of the United Kingdom have been gradually amalgamating in language, customs, and social institutions, and the rough angles of distinctive character, as well as minor differences and peculiarities, have been steadily and rapidly disappearing, more especially within the last twenty-five years, yet this process has not hitherto been so complete but that Scotland and Ireland still continue, although at more broken intervals, to pour forth snatches of their own native minstrelsies. Of our own nation, the bards who have been more particularly prominent are, James Ballantyne, William Thom, William Nicolson, Alexander Rodger, David Vedder, Joseph Train, Robert Gilfillan, Charles Gray, and Robert Nicol, —the last especially a young man of high promise,—all of whom have honourably, and in their degree, contributed some beautiful lyrics to the national collection ; while from the immense mass of verse—good, bad, and indifferent—which diversify the pages of the *omne-gatherum* entitled “ Whistlebinkie,” it would seem that, in the western shires, at least two per cent of the population possess the gift of song, and are *au fait* at expressing themselves “ in numerous verse.” Not less distinct in their native character are the ballads and songs of modern Ireland. The best of these—and many of them are full of spirit, wild grace, and passionate beauty—have proceeded from the pens of Thomas Davis, Gerald Griffin, John Banim, T. J. Callanan, Samuel Ferguson, William Maginn, Clarence Mangan, Edward Walsh, Samuel Lover, and John Anster ; and we have, besides, touching specimens by Mrs Tighe, the Hon. Mrs Price Blackwood, and Mrs Downing. I know of few things so wildly sweet, so profoundly solemn, as the following stanzas by the last-named lady, entitled, “ The Grave of

Macaura,” a leader who, it seems, fell in fight with the Fitzgeralds in 1261.

“ And this is thy grave, Macaura,  
 Here by the pathway lone,  
 Where the thorn-blossoms are bending  
 Over thy mouldered stone.  
 Alas! for the sons of glory;  
 Oh! thou of the darkened brow,  
 And the eagle plume, and the belted clans,  
 Is it here thou art sleeping now?

Oh wild is the spot, Macaura,  
 In which they have laid thee low—  
 The field where thy people triumphed  
 Over a slaughter’d foe;  
 And loud was the Banshee’s wailing,  
 And deep was the clansmen’s sorrow,  
 When, with bloody hands and burning tears,  
 They buried thee here, Macaura!

And now thy dwelling is lonely,  
 King of the rushing horde;  
 And now thy battles are over,  
 Chief of the shining sword;  
 And the rolling thunder echoes  
 O’er torrent and mountain free,  
 But alas! and alas! Macaura,  
 It will not awaken thee.

Farewell to thy grave, Macaura,  
 Where the slanting sunbeams shine,  
 And the briar and waving fern  
 Over thy slumbers twine;  
 Thou whose gathering summons  
 Could waken the sleeping glen;  
 Macaura, alas for thee and thine,  
 ’Twill never be heard again!”

Mixed up with many of the elements used by Wordsworth, Hunt, Keats, and Shelley, poetry, about twenty

years ago, began to assume something like a new form of manifestation in the verse of Alfred Tennyson,—a man of fine and original, but of capricious and wayward genius.

With a delightful manner of his own—one more so this age knoweth not—Tennyson seems strangely destitute of self-reliance. This fine peculiar manner he has exhibited in “Locksley Hall,” “The Talking Oak,” “The Day-dream,” “The Moated Grange,” “The May Queen,” “The Lotos Eaters,” and “The Morte d’Arthur ;” as also in his ballads of “Oriana,” “Lady Clara Vere de Vere,” and “The Lord of Burleigh ;” yet, not content with it—seemingly because it is native to his mind, and spontaneous—he is continually making infelicitous incursions into the chartered demesnes of others,—more especially of the bards just enumerated. This is most unfortunate, and it is wrong, more especially as perfectly unrequired. No one ever mistook a page of Spenser’s “Faery Queen” for a page either of Davenant’s “Gondibert,” or of Fletcher’s “Purple Island”—a page of William Shakspeare for a page of John Milton—or even one of Dryden for one of Pope. In all great masters there is—must be—a perfect unity in style and handling, however they may vary their subjects, as Byron did, from “Childe Harold” to “Don Juan.” It is so throughout all Crabbe, from his early “Library” and “Village,” to his posthumous tales, penned half a century afterwards ; throughout all Scott, from his “Lay” to his “Lord of the Isles.” The mind that conceived “Madoc” reigns unaltered, save in the degrees of power, throughout “Thalaba,” “Kehama,” and “Roderick.” “The child being father of the man,” the Lyrical Ballads claim kindred with “The Recluse.” Even Wilson’s juvenile “Verses on James Grahame” only precede in time his maturer “Unimore.” In the one, we have the mountain stream ; in the other, that same stream as the broad lowland river. Far differently

stand matters with Alfred Tennyson. His compositions are as unlike each other as the opposite hues of the rainbow—as the features of the Goth from the Negro—as Nova Zembla from the Line. He is now a simulacrum of Shelley, as in “The Palace of Sin,” “The Vision of Art,” and “The Two Voices,”—now of Wordsworth, as in “Dora,” and “The Gardener’s Daughter,”—now of Coleridge, as in “The Merman and Mermaid,”—now of Keats, as in “C enone,”—and now of Quarles Donne, and Wither combined, in “The Death of the Old Year,” “The Deserted House,” “Adeline and Claribel,” and “The Poet’s Mind.”

Tennyson has thus made his poetry a rich mosaic, exhibiting various styles of excellence; but it has this certain and pervading virtue, that it is never in any instance wire-woven or heavy. In very dread of this, he flies to the exactly opposite extreme, until he almost induces the belief in his readers that he must regard the uncommon as synonymous with the excellent. Overlooking obvious, he hunts for recondite beauties—shuts his eyes on the planet Jupiter, glowing like a sun at the zenith, yet opens them on the Georgium Sidus, glinting like a firefly through the mists of the horizon. Sometimes he is out-and-out fantastic, as in “The Lady of Shallot;” sometimes scholastic, as in “Ulysses;” sometimes monastic, as in “St Simeon Stylites;” and sometimes bombastic, as in “Audley Court,” as well as in sundry passages of “The Princess.” He shrinks from looking Nature straight in the face: it is against his temperament and his system; although, when he has mastered his evident reluctance to do so—as in his “Dora” and “May Queen”—I like him more heartily than in almost any other of his many-sided excellencies.

Throughout these two pieces runs a vein of pathos exquisitely simple, and as precious and pure as that pervading the “We are Seven,” the “Lucy Gray,” and “The Pet Lamb” of Wordsworth—a pathos which goes

at once to the heart ; while, in “The Morte d’Arthur” —to me the highest of all Tennyson’s efforts—there is a serenity of solitude and repose, a rude remote magnificence, haunting the imagination with a feeling of dreary sublimity. In the ballad of “Oriana,” and in the “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” we have his picturesqueness, as viewed from the most opposite quarters —of Eastern sunshine and Arctic frost ; nor would it be easy to which rightly to award the palm. The incidents in both are mere pegs, on which, in the one, he has hung garlands of the most luxurious imagery—rich, warm, and glowing with beauty ; while the other, bleak and wild as an iceberg, is draped in the gloom of self-accusing guilt, delirious regret, and sullen despair. Take the latter, and perhaps the finer :—

“ My heart is wasted with my woe,  
                   Oriana ;  
 There is no rest for me below,  
                   Oriana.  
 When the long dun wolds are ribbed with snow,  
 And loud the Norland whirlwinds blow,  
                   Oriana ;  
 Alone I wander to and fro,  
                   Oriana.  
 Ere the light on dark was growing,  
                   Oriana ;  
 At midnight the cock was crowing,  
                   Oriana ;  
 Winds were blowing, waters flowing,  
 We heard the steeds to battle going,  
                   Oriana ;  
 Aloud the hollow bugle blowing,  
                   Oriana.  
 In the yew wood black as night,  
                   Oriana,  
 Ere I rode into the fight,  
                   Oriana,  
 While blissful tears blinded my sight



By star-shine, and by moonlight,  
    Oriana,  
I to thee my troth did plight,  
    Oriana.  
She stood upon the castle wall,  
    Oriana :  
She watched my crest among them all,  
    Oriana :  
She saw me fight, she heard me call,  
When forth there stept a foeman tall,  
    Oriana,  
Atween me and the castle wall,  
    Oriana.  
The bitter arrow went aside,  
    Oriana,  
The false, false arrow went aside,  
    Oriana ;  
The damned arrow glanced aside,  
And pierced thy heart—my love, my bride,  
    Oriana !  
Thy heart—my life, my love, my bride,  
    Oriana !  
Oh ! narrow, narrow was the space,  
    Oriana :  
Loud, loud rang out the trumpet's brays,  
    Oriana.  
Oh ! deathful stabs were dealt apace,  
The battle deepened in its place,  
    Oriana ;  
And I was down upon my face,  
    Oriana.  
They should have stabbed me where I lay,  
    Oriana !  
How could I rise and come away,  
    Oriana ?  
How could I look upon the day ?  
They should have stabbed me where I lay,  
    Oriana.  
They should have trod me into clay,  
    Oriana.



tricably interwoven, and the latter are so glaring and many—nay, often apparently so wilful—that, as a sincere admirer of the genius of Tennyson, I could almost wish the poem had remained unwritten. I admit the excellence of particular passages; but it has neither general harmony of design, nor sustained merit of execution. We have ever and anon scintillations of the true fire, glimpses of rare and genuine beauty, but these are anon smothered by affectations, or vitiated by mannerisms. Associations utterly incongruous are continually found linked together—the beautiful with the deformed, the majestic with the mean, the masculine with the puerile, Helen of Paris with the Hottentot Venus, Sir Walter Raleigh with Elwes the miser, Harry Hotspur with Justice Shallow; while in its versification we have involution and harshness, which, whether the result of carelessness, or designed for the purpose of evading monotony, are equally infelicitous.

No poetry can be reckoned of high excellence in which are not evinced the capacity to conceive, as well as the capacity to finish—taste governing, moulding, and modelling the rough-hewn creations of fancy, dispensing with redundancies, and bringing each separate aspect into harmonious subordination to the general effect. “How much the power of poetry depends on the nice inflections of rhythm alone, can be proved,” as James Montgomery beautifully observes, “by taking the finest passages of Milton or Shakspeare, and merely putting them into prose, with the least possible variation of the words themselves. The attempt would be like gathering up dew-drops, which appear jewels and pearls upon the grass, but run into water in the hand; the essence and the elements remain, but the grace, the sparkle, and the form are gone.”

To this I would add, that congruity of style and management are quite as necessary as congruity of imagery, rhythm, or language. Wordsworth certainly

exorbitantly taxes his reader's ideas of consistency when he inculcates the highest lessons of philosophic morality through the medium of a peripatetic pedlar—"a vagrant merchant bending 'neath his load"—one who must be supposed (else he had no business there) this moment measuring out Welsh flannel, and the next riding the high-horse of transcendental metaphysics. But we feel all the while that, *nomine mutato*, it is not the pedlar, but the poet who speaks, although not *in propriâ personâ*—the latter making the former his mere puppet mouth-piece. The incongruities of "The Princess" are of a far more inexplicable kind, and lie less on the surface—as they do in "The Excursion"—than in the subject itself, penetrating to the very bones and marrow of the composition. At its commencement the poem is as modern in its machinery as a mechanics' institute, —rejoicing in steam-models, galvanic batteries, and electric telegraphs, and is only wanting in a touch of Dr Darling and electro-biology to bring it down to "this Modern Athens and this hour." In its progress it becomes first sentimental, then philosophic, then romantic, then downright chivalric; and, towards its conclusion, issues in a *crambe recocta* of all heterogeneous elements—for which it would be difficult to discover a palpable simile, except we find it in a Centaur, "half man and half horse"—or in a mermaid, "a lovely lady with a fish's tail"—or in a Caliban, or in a "Bottom the weaver," with his innocent ass's mouth, "watering for thistles." In short, "The Princess" is veritably what Tennyson has himself termed it, "a medley"—a mixture of the prosaic utilitarianism of modern life with the euphuistic heroism of ancient sentiment—Jeremy Bentham embracing Don Quixote; of the familiar and conventional with the heightened and ideal—William Cobbett "how-d'ye-doing" to Marcus Tullius Cicero. Such materials may be brought into juxtaposition, and ordered, like George Colman's Newcastle apothecary's

draught—“when taken, to be well shaken;” but oil and water cannot be made to amalgamate. The same un-escapable hodge-podge would have resulted had Shakespeare attempted to blend the high-toned metaphysical reveries of Hamlet with the blustering bladder-blown bravado of Ancient Pistol, and after “To be or not to be, that is the question,” had added, “I eat this leek in token of revenge!” The general impression left on the mind by “The Princess” is therefore, as might have been expected, simply the grotesque.

Tennyson’s latest volume, “In Memoriam,” although far from being an immaculate one, especially in the matter of taste, is alike honourable to his genius and heart, and far more worthy of his reputation than “The Princess.” It is a collection of elegiac quatrains dedicated to the memory of a dear personal friend—Arthur Hallam, a son of the celebrated historian, and the affianced of the poet’s sister; and, taking bereavement for its key-note, wails on through all the Æolian harmonies of sorrow. Many of these are replete with elemental, truthful beauty; others are quaint and speculative; while not a few deal too largely in the symbols of imagination to directly influence the heart. In these instances, too, the language is frequently as abstract as the recondite and subtle idea which it is meant to convey; and the reader has the utmost difficulty in deciphering it.

The following stanzas are very beautiful:—

“The path by which we twain did go,  
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,  
Through four sweet years arose and fell,  
From flower to flower, from snow to snow;

And we with singing cheered the way,  
And crowned with all the season lent,  
From April on to April went,  
And glad of heart from May to May.

But where the path we walked began  
 To slant the fifth autumnal slope,  
 As we descended following Hope,  
 There sat the Shadow feared of man;

Who broke our fair companionship,  
 And spread his mantle dark and cold ;  
 And wrapped thee formless in the fold,  
 And dulled the murmur on thy lip ;

And bore thee where I could not see  
 Nor follow, though I walk in haste ;  
 And think that, somewhere in the waste,  
 The shadow sits and waits for me."

One of the prominent peculiarities of the "In Memoriam" is, that all the many separate little pieces of which the book is composed are written in one unvaried measure, and that each, like a sonnet, embodies some one leading idea ; and, as embracing both these characteristics, I know of no antetype, save perhaps the sonnets of Petrarch. This pervading thought is in itself generally fine ; and the majority of the individual bits in this composite are highly polished. We have many exquisite descriptive touches, as well as many of those salient sentimental sparks which genius can alone scintillate. Not a few portions, however, are hazy and obscure, alike in thought and expression ; and, having the least conceivable connection with the general theme, look "like orient pearls merely at random strung." What should constitute the soul and essence of elegiac poetry ? Pathos—the unequivocal, the simple, natural expression of that sorrow which comes from and goes to the heart, and which is, "when unadorned, adorned the most ;" and, judged by that standard, how much have we in the "In Memoriam ?" Milton, to be sure, has his "Lycidas," and Shelley his "Adonais ;" but I

doubt much if the ice-cold metaphysical conceits contained in either ever drew a tear from an unacademic eye. Not so wrote King David of Saul and Jonathan : not so in Rama mourned Rachel for her children, "because they were not." The fountain of tears must be moved by a spell, not by an analysis of feeling, critical, recondite, and labelled with the phases and moods of sympathetic emotion.

Let it not be for one moment supposed that I am not deeply alive to the excellencies of Alfred Tennyson as a poet, for I regard him as in some points standing at this moment at the very head of our poetical literature. But he is much more apt to be copied in his errors than his excellencies : and what I maintain is, that, although a great artist, he is a very unequal one. Possessed of a rich and rare genius, he is, in a certain walk, and that his own—the imaginative, the quaintly graphic, and the picturesque—unquestionably a master. Above all, his poetry possesses, in an eminent degree, one of the highest attributes—suggestiveness ; and there he will even stand the severe test of old Longinus, who enunciates in his tenth section that "we may pronounce that sublime, beautiful, and true, which permanently pleases, and which *takes generally with all sorts of men.*"

The laurel crown of England, "which Dryden and diviner Spenser wore," has, by the recent lamented decease of the great Poet of the Lakes, been transferred to the more youthful brows of Alfred Tennyson.

"He won it well, and may he wear it long."

The poetry of Richard Monckton Milnes possesses very considerable elegance and taste—a philosophic sentiment and a graceful tenderness, but is deficient in individuality and power ; although perhaps not so much so as might at first seem, for, as in Henry Taylor's, the grand pervading element is repose—his sunset

has no clouds, and his morning no breezes. From his lack of constructiveness and dramatic passion, he appears to most advantage in his serious, his sentimental, and descriptive sketches, many of which are fine and striking, although he often mars the general effect by unnecessary analysis. He may be said to have followed more in the wake of Wordsworth than of any other preceding poet, although his admiration for Keats and Shelley is not seldom unapparent. His narrative is wanting in rapidity and action, and is apt to fall into a pleasing monotony and languor, from which we are not roused by salient points: the current of his thoughts would be vivified by more frequent breaks and waterfalls. Hence his "Poetry for the People" was a misnomer; for instead of being circumstantial and palpable, it was abstract, and beyond the reach of their sympathies. About all the productions of Monckton Milnes there is an artist-like finish; and his ear is finely attuned to the melodies of verse.

With much more of the popular element in his mind, and with a greater dash of spirit and animation, Dr Charles Mackay stands nearly on the same level with Mr Monckton Milnes. His earliest poem, "The Hope of the World," was referable to the school of Goldsmith and Rogers; his next, "The Salamandrine," leant towards Coleridge and Shelley—a circumstance probably to be traced to the nature of the subject; but in the "Legends of the Isles" he thinks and writes more independently; the best of these being "The Death of the Sea King" and "St Columba," which vary from the simple, unadorned ballad style, to the more ambitious one of the lyric ode. In his "Voices from the Crowd," and his "Voices from the Mountains," there is even yet more genuine poetical power, especially in the verses headed "The Phantoms of St Sepulchre," and "We are wiser than we know." "Street Companions," in the "Town Lyrics," is also pregnant with thought, and a



spirit of poetry fine and impressive. We delight to observe the march of progress in an author, and in Dr Mackay, as I have just remarked, this is very apparent; for "Egeria," his last, is by far his best poem, whether we regard felicity of conception, or imaginative and artistic power; many of its passages, viewed in the light of didactic verse, being of high and rare merit both as to manner and matter.

In a clever and spirited introduction, Dr Mackay takes a view quite opposed to my own in reference to the effects of Poetry and Science on each other—nay, he even admits general politics as a legitimate auxiliary element. But he has said nothing which seems in the slightest degree to affect my position; and I cannot help still regarding Poetry the imaginative and limitless, and Science the definite and true, as *per se* antagonistic. Equally unsatisfactory is his argument, that the development of abstract truths does not circumscribe the boundaries of fancy's field; for poetry has ever found "the haunt and the main region of her song," either in the grace and beauty, which cannot be analysed, or in the sublime of the indefinite. Newton, with his dissection of the "Rainbow;" Anson, with his circumnavigation; and Franklin with his lightning-kite, were all disenchanters. Angels no longer alight on the Iris; Milton's "sea-covered sea—sea without shore," is a geographical untruth; and in the thunder, men hear no more the voice of the Deity.

Having throughout these Lectures abstained from whatever might be regarded as pure dramatic literature, I have altogether passed over many writers distinguished for the high poetical excellencies displayed in their compositions—more especially Maturin, Sheridan Knowles, Marston, White, Horne, Samuel Brown, Lovell Beddoes, William Smith, Henry Taylor, and Thomas Noon Talfour, each well worthy of separate and especial consideration; but this should have led me into a field of

examination utterly incompatible with my present necessarily narrow limits. I should have also liked to have been able to add some strictures on the brother poets of America, more especially Henry Longfellow, and William Cullen Bryant, for both of whom I have a high admiration—the one being distinguished for the possession of the very element in which our recent verse is so deficient—imaginative truth—and the other having preserved, in many of his pictures, the native aboriginal tone, which must hereafter render them invaluable. The merits of our very young rising poets—many of them of high promise—I have purposely abstained from discussing, as it would be mere prophecy to assign to them anything like fixed comparative degrees of rank, although I have great delight in pointing to the names of Burbidge, Cassels, Clough, Westwood, Bennet, Allingham, and Paton.

Robert Browning, as a poet of promise, was regarded by some as equalling Tennyson. In his "Paracelsus," from out a cloudy tabernacle were darted tongues of flame; but the smoke has never cleared away. In it we had much of mysticism, affectation, obscurity, nay, utter incomprehensibility, mixed up with many fine aspirations, and a variety of magnificent outlines, although no separate scene could be said to satisfy. We had abundance of bold rough draughts, some in the manner of Turner, and others in the manner of Martin, all "dark with excessive bright;" but no single picture filled up and coloured. "Sordello," which followed it, was the strangest vagary ever submitted to the world in the shape of verse, and as incomprehensibly mysterious as the riddles of the Sphinx. Some recondite meaning the book probably may have; but I am not aware that any one has ever been able to discover it, although I think Mr Horne, the author of "Orion," once made a guess. At all events its intelligibility does not shine on the surface, nor in any twenty consecutive lines.

In the "Bells and Pomegranates," we have now and then glimpses of poetic sentiment and description, like momentary sunbeams darting out between rifted clouds; but straightway the clouds close, and we are left to plod on in deeper twilight. The truth is, that with an ill-regulated imagination, Mr Browning has utterly mistaken singularity for originality—the uncommon for the fine. Style and manner he despises; indeed, he may be said to have none—for these are with him like the wind blowing where it listeth; or, as extremes meet, he may be said to have all kinds, from the most composite and arabesque to the most disjointed and Doric. Even in his serious and earnest themes, he thinks nothing of leaping at once from the Miltonic to the Hudibrastic; and to poetry as an art, such as it was in the hands of Pope and Collins, of Gray and Goldsmith, of Coleridge and Campbell, he seems to have utterly blinded himself, assuming for his motto the boastful lines of old Withers:—

"Pedants shall not tie my strains  
To our antique poets' veins;  
Being born as free to these,  
I shall sing as I shall please."

Browning never seems to lack materials; but, huddled together as we find them, they may be denominated cairns—not buildings. The creations of his pen have therefore the same relation to external nature, and the goings-on of actual life, that day-dreams have to realities, or apparitional castles and cataracts in the clouds to their earthly counterparts. Genius of some kind—it may be of a high kind—Browning must have; but, most assuredly, never was genius of any kind or degree more perversely misapplied. A small band of transcendental worshippers may follow him, as they do Emerson; but even these will, I fear, be forced to content themselves with the idea, that surely there must be

some thread which might enable them to grope their way through the more than Cretan intricacies of his mystical labyrinth,—if they could only catch hold of it.

It is but too evident that German quasi-philosophy—the physics of Oken, and the metaphysics of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, have been doing for much of the poetry of the last twenty years what French propagandism did for it at the beginning of the century, when a band of our young bards were pantisocratists. But the delusive colours, which “played in the plighted clouds,” died away before the light of their maturer intellects. Among these “*Fata Morgana*,” these baseless fabrics of vision, poor Shelley utterly, and Coleridge for a season, bewildered himself; but the latter happily returned to his better mind, to common-sense, and to Christianity.

John Sterling had some high qualities of mind, but he was utterly destitute of the self-reliance necessary to constitute a great poet. The finest of all his productions, as a mere poem, is “The Sexton’s Daughter,” a striking lyrical ballad produced in early youth, ere he sank into poetic misgivings. His mind seemed perpetually passing through new phases, and resting in none. His energy commands our respect, but not more often than its misapplication does our censure or our regret. His anxieties were almost uniformly profitless or misapplied.

As a poet and dramatist, Sterling possessed taste, ingenuity, and a kind of rhetorical inspiration; but much greater things were expected from him than he ever had the capability to accomplish. Unsettled in all his plans and projects, as well as in his views and feelings, he laboriously frittered away his years, if not in profitless exertion, at least in a way that rendered their results nearly ineffective for good or evil. With considerable power, his mind was, like Shelley’s, fragmentary and incomplete; and like him he was also at once acute,

yet obscure—bold, yet uncertain. He had much of the same metaphysical subtlety, but was far behind him in imagination. In connection with this subject, Mr Gillfillan eloquently says,—“Sterling, in his wide and trembling sympathies with literary excellence, and in his devoted enthusiasm for the varied expressions of the beautiful, as well as in the hectic heat and eagerness of his temperament, bore a strong likeness to Shelley, although possessing a healthier, happier, and better balanced nature.” Alas! even for such health, such happiness, and such intellectual equipoise, which at best can only be compared to Campbell’s picture of the Peruvian bridge :—

“A wild cane arch, high flung o’er gulf profound,  
That fluctuates when the storms of El Dorado sound.”

Of Philip James Bailey, the author of “Festus,” and “The Angel World,” it is still more difficult to speak; although, as a poet of actual achievement, I can have no hesitation in placing him far above either Browning or Sterling. His “Festus” is, in many respects, a very remarkable production—remarkable alike for its poetic power and its utter neglect of all the requirements of poetic art. It is such a wilderness of weeds and flowers, its blemishes and its beauties are so inextricably interwoven, its combinations of imagery are so perplexed, and its conceptions often so indefinite or abortive, that we can only liken it here to “Chaos come again,” and there to Vesuvius during an eruption—bright flames, black smoke, and lava torrents. The germinal idea no doubt originated in Goethe’s “Faust,” but the poem of the great German is not less distinguished for its high art as a composition, than for its daring speculative philosophy. “Festus” has no claim to the former attribute, for in point of style it is frequently utterly loose and disjointed; while in the latter it out-Herods Herod, and runs riot among all kinds of

metaphysical exaggerations and absurdities. Its sole redemption lies in the vivid tongues of flame—the lightnings of undoubted genius ever and anon bursting from its dark masses of encompassing smoke—in the grains of gold sparkling amid its lumps of soiling clay. On its metaphysics I do not mean to enter, as they seem a strange compound of Christian doctrine and Hegelian transcendentalism ; and all its oracles are enunciated from a cloudy tabernacle. Yet, with all these excesses and defects, we are made to feel that "Festus" is the work of a poet. We cannot be deaf to the utterances of a bold and fervent spirit ; for these speak to us alike in his half-prosaic colloquialisms, and in his imaginative soarings.

The great text which he labours to expound, if I can quite make it out, is the ultimate subordination of evil to good, and the infinite love of Heaven to all created things ; but from the main current of the theme a thousand erratic rivulets diverge, running no one knows whither.

In "The Angel World," we have the youthful poet more sobered down ; and the consequent result has been one not exactly to be wished—its beauties and its defects are each alike less prominent. In disciplining his imagination, it has lost much of its force and lustre ; and his style, if more subdued and symmetrical, has become more artificial, and has ceased to throw out those wildflowers which hung about it like a natural garland. The scope and tendency of the poem I pretend not to decipher. It is of a symbolic character, and seems to involve many mysteries, which a few may delight to pry into ; but its merit will be found to consist entirely in its descriptive passages, and its typification of abstract conceptions by ideal forms—one angel being apparently intended for Faith, another Humility, and a third Human Nature. Alike in this poem and its predecessor, Bailey seems to advocate the doctrine of

ultimate universal salvation, as also the law of universal necessity. I do not know that I can find any passage more impressed with the mingled grandeur and grotesqueness of his manner than the following: it is part of the dream that Elissa relates to her lover Lucifer :—

“Methought that I was happy, because dead.

All hurried to and fro, and many cried

To each other—‘Can I do thee any good?’

But no one heeded; nothing could avail:

The world was one great grave. I looked and saw

Time on his two great wings—one night—one day—

Fly moth-like right into the flickering sun,

So that the sun went out, and they both perished.

And one gat up and spoke—a holy man—

Exhorting them; but each and all cried out—

‘Go to—it helps not—means not: we are dead.’

‘Bring out your hearts before me. Give your limbs

To whom ye list or love. My son Decay

Will take them: give them him. I want your hearts,

That I may take them up to God.’ There came

These words amongst us, but we knew not whence.

It was as if the air spake. And there rose

Out of the earth a giant thing, all earth—

His eye was earthy, and his arm was earthy;

He had no heart. He but said, ‘I am Decay;’

And as he spake he crumbled into earth,

And there was nothing of him. But we all

Lifted our faces up at the word God,

And spied a dark star high above in the midst

Of others, numberless as are the dead,

And all plucked out their hearts, and held them in

Their right hands. Many tried to pick out specks

And stains, but could not; each gave up his heart.

And something—all things—nothing—it was Death,

Said, as before, from air—‘Let us to God!’

And straight we rose, leaving behind the raw

Worms and dead gods; all of us—soared and soared

Right upwards, till the star I told thee of  
 Looked like a moon—the moon became a sun ;  
 The sun—there came a hand between the sun and us,  
 And its five fingers made five nights in air.  
 God tore the glory from the sun's broad brow,  
 And flung the flaming scalp off flat to Hell :  
 I saw him do it ; and it passed close by us."

Here we have the wild extravagance and the magnificent imagination blent. We do not know whether more to admire or shudder ; yet we acknowledge the vital presence and power which makes the vision terrible, even after Clarence's dream.

Passing at a tangent from the tame, the artificial, the conventional school of Hayley, and the hyperbolical extra-mundane one of Lewis, I am willing to admit that the poetry of Joanna Baillie and William Wordsworth may have rested too exclusively on mere simplicity or naturalness of sentiment and emotion ; that Scott, on the other hand, may have too unreservedly hinged on action and description ; and that the Italianisms of Hunt, Keats, and Cornwall, no doubt occasionally merged into affectation. But it was scarcely to be expected, even ere Campbell had passed away from among us,—and who had given us such admirable illustrations of the classical and romantic combined—that he was to see the rise, and shudder over the progress of a school—as I know he did—which was to rejoice in poetical conception without poetical execution—which was to substitute the mere accumulation of the raw materials for the triumph of art in their arrangement ;—in short, to displace the Parthenon by a Stonehenge. Such, however, has been the case, and such the course of events, to whatever cause the anomaly is to be traced,—whether to the wearing out, or case-hardening of the soil by the great masters, who have illuminated our age ; or to the main current of the national mind having been diverted into quite another channel



—that of physical science—leaving poetry to harp to the winds or to an audience sparse and select.

It would almost seem that there is some shadow of truth in this latter hypothesis ; but instead of poetry having adapted itself to this sobered tone of public feeling, and having become more matter-of-fact, more repressed in its enthusiasm, and more graceful in its expositions of philosophical thought, more genuinely passionate, and more in accordance with what all know and feel to be true and tender, or beautiful or sublime, it has rebelliously kicked up its heels in derision—crying, “A fico for general sympathy and common sense. The man in the moon for ever!” Thus sowing, it must reap.

Simple utterance of feeling—with a mystical commentary on such utterance—is all that the purest disciples of this newest of our schools aspire to. Fine images, allegorical symbols—hieroglyphic meanings—speculative thought, we have in superfluity, but no apparent aim, and seldom any attempt at composition. Tares and wheat are allowed to grow up together to one unweeded harvest, and often the bugloss and the poppy, scattered plentifully throughout the field, look very like flowers in their respective blue and scarlet jackets. But who would term this either agriculture or gardening? Even this utterance of thought seems to be designedly left vague and imperfect, to help out the adage *omne ignotum pro magnifico* ; and although some, nay, occasionally a superabundance, of the materials for poetry may be observed floating about, it is of as uncertain destination as the drift-wood on an autumn-flood. Mysticism in law is quibbling ; mysticism in religion is the jugglery of priestcraft ; mysticism in medicine is quackery—and these often serve their crooked purposes well. But mysticism in poetry can have no attainable triumph. The sole purpose of poetry is to delight and instruct, and no one can be either pleased or profited by

what is unintelligible. It would be as just to call stones and mortar, slates and timber, a mansion, or to call colours and canvass a picture, as to call mystical effervescences poetry. Poems are poetical materials artistically elaborated; and if so, the productions of this school, from Emerson to Browning, cannot be allowed to rank higher than rhapsodical effusions. It is necessary for a poet to think, to feel, and to fancy; but it is also necessary for him to assimilate and combine—processes which the pupils of this transcendental academy seem indeed to wish understood either that they totally overlook, or affect to undervalue as worthless. Results—products—conclusions—not ratiocinations are expected from the poet. “His heart leaps up when he beholds a rainbow in the sky;” but the laws of refraction producing this emotion he leaves to be dealt with as a fit subject for science. It is the province of the poet to describe the western sunset sky “dying like a dolphin” in its changeful hues, not the optical why and wherefore of twilight. In short, his business is with enunciations, not with syllogisms. The poet springs to conclusions not by the logic of science, but by intuition; and whosoever, as a poet, acts either the chemist, the naturalist, or the metaphysician, mistakes the object of his specific mission. Philosophy and poetry may, in most things, not be incompatible; but they are essentially distinct. Metaphysical analyses cannot be accepted as substitutes either for apostrophes to the beautiful, or for utterances of passion. I hold them to be as different from these as principles are from products, or as causes from effects.

I have only two or three words more to add to this, regarding another set of new poetical aspirants, who will not look upon nature with their own unassisted eyes, but are constantly interposing some favourite medium—probably a distorting medium. They see motes between them and the sun, have a horror of foul

air, and filter the living crystal of the fountain in their repugnance to animalculæ—which they are yet restless until they discover. When they sneeze, instead of blessing themselves, according to ancient and innocent custom, they search out a physiological reason; and when they encounter a child crying, they have no sympathetic desire to pat it on the head, but would fain analyse its tears. They are either making monstrous growths out of the green grass on the lap of mother earth, or making new stars from the nebulous fire-mist in the blue abysses of space above their heads. They turn from the obvious and unmistakable, and are off like “wild huntsmen” of imagination, in search of spectral essences; for they flatter themselves with the belief that their reveries are realities; and, dreaming that whatever is *not*, is; and that whatever *is*, is not, their “series of melting views” is christened transcendental philosophy: poetry thus resolving itself into a negation of judgment—into a mere “fancy *in nubibus*,” an entire absorption of intellect in imagination—sunshine playing on morning mists—soon to dislimn in nothingness.

Bailey and Sterling stand, with relation to Tennyson and Mrs Browning, very much as Shelley did with Keats. Their ambition was to sail “with ample pinion,” not only “through the azure fields of air,” but also through all the mists and clouds that came in their way, instead of dealing with the ways and works of men, with the passions and associations of humanity. It is thus that their aspirations, although lofty, are ever indefinite; that their reasonings seem always in a circle, and with no apparent goal. They would fain “dally with the sun, and scorn the breeze;” but they get bewildered, and are drifted away amid the Himmalayahs of cloudland. One grand object of the school to which they belong seems to be—if it indeed have any one distinct and leading principle—to regard the species and

not the individual; to generalise, and not to particularise; to sink the national even in the cosmopolitan: a vision likely to be realised only when man has thrown off all the sloughs of his present nature. Add to this, that, as disciples of Fichte and Schelling, they attribute to the human mind powers that far overpass the boundaries of mere sensation. But where is this to end?—when we remember that, proceeding in the same vague tract, by no means a new one, Schiller succeeded in convincing Goethe that his view of the morphology of plants was the result, not of observation, but of an idea; and that Oken broached a theory, which I believe Professor Owen is not disinclined to adopt, that the classes of animated nature are mere representations of the organs of the senses. That the latter-day poets have high aims and objects, however indefinite and difficult to be deciphered these may appear to the uninitiated, I never doubted. These seem principally to be a desire to exhibit the influence of physical nature on the operations of the fancy and intellect; and we have, in consequence, simply their gropings amid the arcana of mind, in search of those hidden links of mystery which connect the seen to the unseen. But this, as the general subjective material, can scarcely be termed poetry; or, if so, why stop short of versifying Jacob Behmen? In Shakspeare, in Milton, in Akenside, in Wordsworth, in Byron, and in Coleridge, we have, it is true, grand casual aspirations after ideal good, and man's perfectibility, and the knowledge of his whence and wherefore; but to make such the main staple of poetry is a vain attempt at constructing what would be all spirit and no body—a mere twisting of the sea-sand into ropes—for even ghosts should be invisible without the semblance of a corporeal form; and yet these things are selected to form everlasting themes of profitless speculation, to the exclusion of all pictorial effect, and all exercise of the practical understanding.

But although poetry is at present prostrated, it must revive—because it ever has been, and ever must be, a necessary aliment of our human nature. It is evident that literature, from an agglomeration of many concurrent causes, seems destined to accomplish certain specific cycles. We know what occurred on the extinction of the Homeric Chaucer—what followed the passing away of Shakspeare and Milton—how the brilliances of Dryden and Pope waned dim in their disciples. Could it be otherwise in our own age, after the setting of such luminaries as Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and William Wordsworth? But the Occleves and Lyddgates of the first era, the Donnes and Henry Mores of the second, and the Mallets and Tickells of the third, had each their glimmering hour. A brighter poetic day must anon come, with its healthy exhilarating sunshine; and poetry shall again awake in renovation, to exhibit a child-like nature united with a giant's power—the majestic imagination wedded to the masculine intellect.

THE END.

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